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ABSTRACT

This book contains teacher instructions and a set of reproducible activity sheets concerned with self-esteem and stress management designed for teachers to use in the classroom. Included are activities for students at all grade levels, kindergarten through grade 12. The expressed purposes of the book are to: (1) explain in simple terms the nature of stress--what causes it and how it affects people physiologically, mentally, and emotionally; (2) make clear the role of thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs in controlling and/or exacerbating stress; (3) present and explore the major components of a comprehensive stress management program; and (4) offer activities within each component that can be used to develop a repertoire of stress management skills in teachers and their students. The first chapter defines stress and discusses the differences between distress, which is associated with unhappy events and feelings, and eustress, which is associated with happy or positive circumstances and feelings. The mental, physical, and emotional effects of stress are elaborated, and several broad approaches to helping students manage stress are outlined. Other chapters focus on anger and worry, nutrition, exercise, relaxation, self-talk, assertiveness, time management, and a specialized communication process called the sharing circle. Each chapter begins with background information and a discussion of the relevant concepts, followed by activities that enable students to practice related stress-management techniques. (NB)

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CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

A Sourcebook for Teaching Stress Management and Fostering Self-Esteem

Sandy Schuster

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CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

A Sourcebook for Teaching Stress Management and Fostering Self-Esteem

Sandy Schuster

INNERCHOICE PUBLISHING • P. O. Box 2476, Spring Valley, CA 91979 • (619) 698-2437

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Too much stress eventually effects our mental and physical health, and lowers the satisfaction we get from our work.

Hans Selye
Stress Without Distress

Most stress is not caused by the great tragedies of life, however. Most of it comes from the accumulation of minor irritants that steadily grind us down over the years . . . Your body, mind, and spirit will send you their distress signals. Be aware. Listen to yourself.

Donald A. Tubesing
Kicking Your Stress Habits

Acknowledgments

Many parts blend to make the whole greater with no work done in isolation. I sincerely appreciate the contributions of previous authors and researchers in the field of stress management whose efforts helped shape the theory and practical activities in this work. In addition, I would like to acknowledge my family whose love and support are always unwavering. Thanks to Dianne Schilling for her word smithing, Dave Cowan for his creative input, Susanna Palomares for her direction and vision, and Cheryl Watkins for her support and encouragement

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Introduction

Stress plagues students daily, causing them to feel helpless, overwhelmed, even ill. Stress can erode health, undermine self-esteem, and cripple academic progress. You carry a sizable burden of stress, too. Frustrated and on the verge of burn-out, many teachers struggle constantly to feel productive at school, fulfilled in their personal life, and influencial in the development of their students.

Nothing in this book will eliminate stress. Economic uncertainty, drugs, crime, alienation, the erosion of the family, school and job pressures—none of these things are likely to go away. What this book can do is help you minimize the effects of stress by managing your work and stress levels more effectively and assisting your students to do the same.

By discussing the information and implementing the activities in each chapter, you and your students will discover how beliefs and behaviors continually *contribute to* and *control* stress levels. You will practice a variety of stress management techniques, discover the ones that work best for you, and routinize them for maximum benefit. Finally, you will become more understanding, accepting, and supportive of one another as you share the possibility of creating a temporary haven from stress in your classroom whenever you choose.

The purposes of this book are to:

1. Explain in simple terms the nature of stress—what causes it and how it affects us physiologically, mentally, and emotionally.

2. Make clear the role of thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs in controlling and/or exacerbating stress.

3. Present and explore the major components of a comprehensive stress-management program.

4. Offer activities within each component that you can use to develop a repertoire of stress-management skills in yourself and your students.

- The first chapter defines stress in some detail and discusses the differences between **distress and eustress.** The mental, physical, and emotional effects of stress are elaborated, and several broad approaches to helping students manage stress are outlined.

- **Anger and worry** generate much needless distress in the lives of students. Anger is a normal emotion that can be understood and managed, and the vast majority of worrisome events over which

students sacrifice productivity and sleep never occur. Activities in this chapter help students gain control over these highly accessible *internal* sources of stress—and in the process build self-esteem and a sense of personal agency.

- Chapters dealing with **nutrition** and **exercise** depict the balance of energy intake and output that is designed by nature to keep us going through even the most stressful day. Together, good nutrition and regular aerobic exercise form the core of a successful stress management program. Activities in these chapters encourage students to take responsibility for their meal- and snack-time choices and to regularly treat themselves to the physical and psychological benefits of exercise.

- The chapter on **relaxation** describes procedures for incorporating relaxation techniques into your classroom routine. Tense, preoccupied students are not terribly receptive to learning, so take the time to implement breathing, visualization, meditation, and progressive relaxation activities on a regular basis. You'll notice the difference almost immediately.

- The chapter on **self-talk** explores the causal link between beliefs and feelings, demonstrating how negative feelings and irrational belief systems act as stressors, undermining health and self-esteem. The messages that students continually give themselves directly affect their self-esteem, school performance, and health. For this reason, positive self-talk is among the most powerful stress-management tools.

- The chapter on **assertiveness** focuses on our right as individuals to expect fair treatment, refuse excessive demands, say no when we choose to, and express feelings openly, making our wishes known to others. As a tool, assertiveness is particularly useful when responding to stressful situations involving other people. Students will benefit from having many opportunities to practice assertive skills in the safe environment of your classroom.

- The chapter dealing with **time-management** helps students assess their use of time, identify time-wasters, and develop the habit of prioritizing tasks and activities. Students who are well-organized suffer much less "time-shortage" stress. Activities in this chapter show students how to plan their days to ensure completion of high-priority tasks and have sufficient time left over to accommodate recreational, social, and family activities.

- The final chapter introduces a specialized communication process called the **sharing circle**, an invaluable final addition to this repertoire of stress-management techniques and tools. Everyone needs to be listened to, especially students. During times of stress, a good listener becomes an invaluable sounding board as students express thoughts, make decisions, and regain control over runaway feelings. Regular use of sharing circles develops vital communication skills, builds self-esteem, develops critical thinking, and provides a sustained outlet for stress.

Each chapter begins with background information and a discussion of relevant concepts, and is followed by activities that enable students to practice related stress-management techniques. Each activity is introduced with a brief explanation of "WHY" the activity is included. If timing or sequence is important, you will also see recommendations concerning "WHEN" the activity should be implemented. Finally, step-by-step instructions tell you "HOW" to lead the activity. In many cases, the instructions are followed by a reproducible "ACTIVITY SHEET" for you to duplicate and distribute to your students.

Included are activities for students at all grade levels, K-12. With a little modification, activities for younger students can be made sufficiently challenging for older students and those for older students can be simplified. By all means, use the activity sheets yourself. Experiencing and modeling stress-management techniques will render them more powerful and useful to students. A welcome bonus is that your own stress levels will subside in the process.

Regular repetition of a new skill ensures internalization. There really is no other way. Practicing guided imagery once or twice will neither promote long-term benefits nor inspire students to use the technique outside the classroom. Recurrent use will accomplish both aims. Before mastery of any technique is possible, students must first become aware of the value of the technique—then practice it often. This book has been designed to create awareness, and then to promote mastery through regular practice.

Managing stress is exercising control, rather than giving up control to others or to the environment. By using the techniques in this book, students can learn to assume responsibility for their own behavior and to take control of their responses to stress.

Distress and Eustress

Twins That Feel Like Strangers

Stress is a natural part of life. We feel it physically as tension and psychologically as pressure in response to many types of situations. Students experience stress related to tests and grades, parental expectations, peer pressure, career decisions, social demands, and a host of other conditions. Something as commonplace as attempting to concentrate in a noisy classroom produces stress. As a teacher, you experience stress controlling the same noisy classroom, planning for the individual needs of thirty or more students, managing ever-mounting paperwork, grading papers, encouraging parent involvement, implementing district-, state-, and federally-mandated programs, and preparing for observations. And that's a mere "sound bite" compared to the list *you* could generate.

Stress accompanies efforts to adapt to almost any form of change, whether a new principal, a substitute teacher, a new home, the death of a loved one—even falling in love. How we handle that pressure or tension impacts productivity, self-esteem, quality of life, and longevity.

We experience two types of stress. Stress caused by what might be termed "happy" circumstances is called *eustress*. Examples include meeting a new group of students on the first day of school, getting a desired grade or promotion, winning the lottery, going on vacation, waiting for a happy event like a wedding, or cheering for a favorite athletic team. Rarely do we need any assistance in dealing with this type of stress. Because eustress is generally associated with positive circumstances, it is experienced as excitement, exhilaration, or a feeling of achievement. Eustress usually involves change and requires some adaptation, but the change is welcome and the adaptation self-enhancing.

"Unhappy" circumstances generate *distress*, which is felt as a state of danger, anxiety, or suffering. Students experience distress when they mismanage their time or money, are thwarted in reaching their goals, are injured or sick, are rejected or fail in some way, or when they lose something or someone of importance to them.

Whether the stress experienced is a result of happy or unhappy events, major life changes or everyday hassles, it is how students react to the stressors that creates the *stress response*. The body experiences the same quickened pulse, heart rate, and breathing during times of both eustress and distress. Yet one stress produces positive feelings and results, the other negative.

The Stimulus: Stressors

Stressors can be grouped in three general categories: physiological, environmental, and mental. Examples of physiological stressors are illness, injury, insomnia, poor nutrition, inadequate fitness, and changes associated with adolescence, menopause, and aging. Environmental conditions that can produce stress include noise, crowds, weather, time, job/school performance standards, and virtually any threat to one's self-esteem. Our thoughts create additional stressors by labeling change or a given experience threatening. The real stress begins when the brain makes its appraisal of a situation and we ask ourself questions like: "How dangerous is it?" and "What resources do I have to cope with this problem?"

The Response: Fight or Flight

Whether the problem is real or imagined, when faced with stress (danger), we experience a reaction known as the "fight or flight" response. Walter B. Cannon, a noted early twentieth-century physiologist at Harvard Medical School, was the first person to describe the fight or flight response as a biochemical sequence the body experiences when confronted by a threat (or perceived threat) to either stand and fight or to run away. Later, Hans Selye, an endocrinologist, studied the fight or flight response in detail and discovered exactly what happens when the body experiences it.

In the fight response when we are faced with a stressor, we prepare to deal with it directly. In ancient times the stressor might have been a saber-toothed tiger, today it is more likely a car cutting us off on the freeway. In the flight response, we attempt to escape or retreat any way we can. We look for an effective way out. On occasion, we may experience a third reaction, which is to *freeze*—to become physically and/or mentally immobilized. For example, a student becomes paralyzed when called to take the podium at his first speech tournament. Much like a deer caught in the headlights of a car, he is unable to flee *or* fight.

The Rush—and Rampage—of Adrenaline

So, stress begins with a life situation which we perceive as something to which we must adapt, and is followed by an emotional reaction—fear, insecurity, frustration, helplessness, or anger, for example. It is these *feelings* that lead to physiological arousal.

As quickly as the brain recognizes that we are facing danger, the *cerebral cortex* sends an alarm signal to the *hypothalamus*. The hypothalamus stimulates the sympathetic nervous system to generate a

series of changes in the body. Adrenaline is released to speed up vital body systems. Heart rate, blood volume, and blood pressure all rise. Under stress, muscles need more fuel, so extra glucose is released by the liver and carried to the muscles. The muscles need more oxygen to turn the extra glucose into energy, so the heart pumps harder. Blood pressure rises and breathing accelerates. While all this is happening, other body systems slow down so that more blood can go to the muscles in preparation for fight or flight. Pupils dilate for sharper vision and hearing becomes more acute. The adrenal glands begin to secrete corticoids (adrenaline, epinephrine, neopinephrine) inhibiting digestion, reproduction, growth and tissue repair, as well as immune and inflammatory responses. Under stress, these functions, which play such important roles in keeping us healthy and strong, are shut down. Digestion decreases so salivary glands dry up (producing the "cotton mouth" sensation) and the digestive operations of the stomach and intestines slow down or stop. We may grow pale, as blood is diverted from the blood vessels near the surface of the skin, and perspire to cool our overheated body.

The same mechanisms that turn the stress response *on* can also turn it *off*. As soon as the brain decides the situation is no longer dangerous, it stops sending emergency signals and the hormones and chemicals that put the body into a state of arousal dissipate. The parasympathetic nervous system, which is generally in charge of conserving energy, takes over. Within three minutes after the brain stops sending danger messages to the body, the fight or flight response ceases and body functions return to normal. Usually these physiological responses last just long enough for us to cope effectively with the source of our stress. However, if we take a long time to deal with the stress or if the stressor occurs frequently, our body *maintains* the charged mode and after a prolonged period of time, may become sick. When this happens, the body is succumbing to chronic stress.

Research has classified the physical response to stress in three stages, which together comprise the **General Adaptation Syndrome:**

1. **Alarm reaction.** The body is mobilized to cope with the challenge presented. Hormones are produced that bestow an arousal effect on the entire body. We are prepared for fight or flight.
2. **Resistance Stage.** Our defense mechanisms are stimulated and the body is prepared to actually deal with the challenge. Signs of alarm diminish. Susceptibility to illness and infectious diseases increases.
3. **Exhaustion Stage.** If during the resistance stage we fail to neutralize the stressful situation, our body progressively runs out of energy and becomes exhausted. This is sometimes called *burn-out*. Exposure to the stressor has nearly depleted supplies of

adaptive energy. Serious illness or death could follow.

Burn-out results from the chronic state of stress. If the body were a car, it would be akin to the oil light on the instrument panel flashing a warning that we are in danger and should take corrective action. Although stressors befall us like rain, if we have a good wax job (effective coping mechanisms), the stressors merely bead up and run off rather than damage the finish.

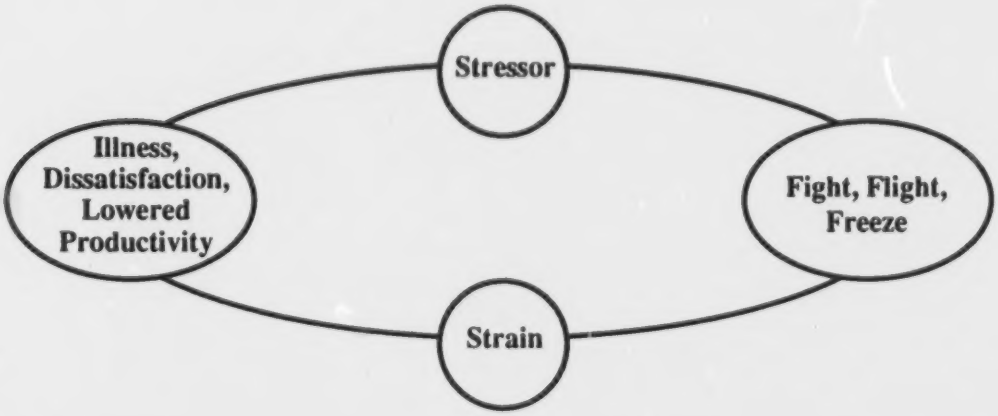
Studies have shown that chronic negative stress contributes to ulcers, colitis, hypertension, heart disease, and other illnesses. In addition, the immune system does not work as efficiently, so a chronically-stressed body is more vulnerable to bacteria and viruses.

Symptoms of stress displayed by children in school include anxiety, irritability, underachievement, aggressiveness, withdrawal, nervous laughter, depression, hyperactivity, and lethargy.

Stress is a necessary and positive force. Without sufficient stimulation, a student may become bored, lethargic, and stagnant. In a state of under-stress, students can feel that they do not have control of their life. Stress becomes a problem only when students are overwhelmed with too much work or too many disruptions, frustrations, or disappointments. When a student feels "burned out," he or she is over-stressed. The task of stress management then is to maintain a balance of life and work styles that keeps students stimulated and invigorated so that they neither burn out nor stagnate.

The Stress Cycle

When stressors occur, the body systems mobilize to deal with the threat and a cycle occurs.



How well students cope with this cycle is dictated by several factors. They will deal *for better or worse* depending upon their personality, heredity, past history, how well they take care of themselves in areas like nutrition and exercise, how skillfully they relate to other people, and to what extent they have support groups in place. Some students may be able to handle significant amounts of stress. Researchers have discovered that people who do avoid the damaging effects of stress have a sense of control in their lives, and a strong sense of commitment to their work and other activities. They respond positively to unexpected events as challenges rather than as threats, and are not overwhelmed by them.

Racehorses and Turtles

Stress actually represents different things to each of us. What is distressful to one student may not be distressful to a second, and may be pleasurable to you. Sky diving is out of the question for someone afraid of heights, while exhilarating to a thrill-seeker. It is not the external event but rather the *perception* of it that produces stress. Selye characterized two distinct capacities for physically withstanding stress. One he termed the "racehorse," the other the "turtle." The racehorse thrives on stimulation and thrills while the turtle prefers his or her stressful challenges in smaller, more controllable doses. Individual responses to stress are learned behaviors that are gleaned from cultural messages, family environment, and peer relationships.

Helping Students Cope with Stress

Talk with your students about stress. Help them understand that stressful situations occur in everyone's life and that it is normal and natural to occasionally "get uptight."

Emphasize that while it is important for students to do the best they can, not everyone can or should get the best grades in class. Work with each student to establish appropriate academic goals. When students achieve their goals, recognize and celebrate their success.

If you work at the elementary level, be aware that students need routines they can depend on. Prepare students for necessary variations and avoid making dramatic changes.

Take time to listen to your students. They need to know that you are there to hear what they have to say. If students feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and feelings with you, they will view you as a resource during periods of stress.

Begin teaching students how to manage their own stress. They will need to:

1. Be aware of what causes stress (their stressors).
2. Know how they tend to react to those stressors.
3. Learn stress management techniques that work well for them.

Developing sound nutritional practices and engaging in regular exercise to increase overall health and fitness will help students better withstand the pressures placed on their body by stress. In addition, relaxation techniques will increase their ability to deal with stress serenely.

Often students are conditioned to avoid stress. Avoidance is promoted by frequent media messages that advocate the use of tranquilizers, alcohol, and other drugs. Students may watch excessive amounts of television, overeat, and resort to other practices that at best handle stress only temporarily or merely cover it up. Ultimately the destructive consequences of avoidance emerge in a myriad of stress-related conditions. Self-defeating avoidance patterns reinforce students'belief that they lack control over their personal trials and tribulations.

Help students define their sources of stress and become more aware of how they respond to them. Encourage them to believe that they can change those responses. Show them how to exercise greater control by discovering new ways of behaving that minimize or prevent adverse effects of stress on their physical and mental well-being.

Although they may have an intellectual understanding of many stress-management techniques, those techniques are of limited value unless students practice them regularly over time. For example, the benefits of relaxation in stress reduction can only be integrated with regular practice. The purpose of practice is twofold. First, it ensures students' being able to consciously execute the technique any time they need to do so and, second, it helps them develop the habit of relaxation at the unconscious level.

The goal of stress management is not to eliminate all stress, but rather to limit the harmful effects of *dis*tress, at the same time maintaining life's quality and vitality. By mastering techniques for managing stressors and their reactions to them, students can develop a healthy, "stress-proofed" life style and higher self-esteem.

Stress Busters

Why

If students are to cope with distressful situations, they need to be familiar with the variety of options available to them. To really cope with a problem means not only recognizing the problem exists but figuring out how to do something about it that will make a difference. Students may not always be able to solve the problem and dissipate the stress, but they may be able to *reduce* the stress.

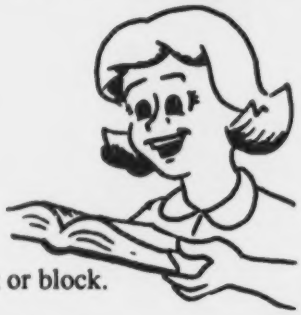
How

1. Give each student a copy of the "Stress Buster" activity sheet, which suggests several ways to cope with stress. Use the activity that is appropriate for your grade level.
2. Read the list with the students, focusing briefly on one suggestion at a time. Ask for a show of hands from students who have tried the suggestion. Then ask for a show of hands from students who would *like to* try the suggestion.
3. Direct those who have tried the suggestion to write a plus (+) mark next to that item on their list, and those who would *like to* try it to mark the item with a check (√).
4. Create two lists on the chalkboard, jotting down suggestions that have been "**Tried**" and suggestions that students "**Want to Try**."
5. As you review each suggestion, elaborate on the importance of diffusing stressful situations. Underscore the fact that there are many techniques students can use to help themselves.

Secondary Activity Sheet

Stress Busters

Put a + next to suggestions for coping with stress that you have *already* tried. Put a √ beside suggestions you think you might *like to* try.



_____Read a story.
_____Talk to a friend.
_____Watch a video.
_____Take a walk.
_____Run around the track or block.
_____Take a nap.
_____Listen to happy or relaxing music.
_____Eat healthy snacks like fruit.
_____Play with your dog, cat, or other pet.
_____Compose a song.
_____Build something
_____Take a warm bath.
_____Help a friend with a homework assignment.
_____Daydream about happy things.
_____Talk to a friend.
_____Play a game with a friend.
_____Skateboard.
_____Roller skate.
_____Play a computer game.

_____ _____
_____ _____
_____ _____
_____ _____
_____ _____

Elementary Activity Sheet

Stress Busters

Put a + next to suggestions for coping with stress that you have *already* tried. Put a √ beside suggestions you think you might *like to* try.

_____Blow soap bubbles.
_____Sculpt some modeling clay.
_____String beads.
_____Color a picture.
_____Draw a picture.
_____Compose a song.
_____Help a friend with a homework assignment.
_____Tell a joke to a friend.
_____Call grandma and grandpa.
_____Put a puzzle together.
_____Run around the playground.
_____Think about Disneyland.
_____Play a computer game
_____Read a story.
_____Build something
_____Eat healthy snacks like fruit.
_____Play with your dog, cat, or other pet.
_____Listen to happy or relaxing music.
_____Pump high on the swings.

____ _____
____ _____
____ _____
____ _____
____ _____

The Stress and Relaxation Story

Why

By writing about and describing a stressful day and a peaceful, relaxed day, students are able to identify ways in which they can direct more days to be of the serene variety as opposed to the stressful.

How

1. As a prewriting activity, brainstorm two lists of activities (things students might normally be expected to do in the course of a day), one under the heading, "**Stressful**," the other under the heading, "**Relaxing**".
2. Under each heading, list as many activities as the students can generate. If you have a copy of the *IALAC Story* by Sid Simon (Argus Communications), which describes a classic stressful day, read it to your students.
3. Have each student write two stories, the first about the most stressful day he/she can remember experiencing, and the second about a wonderfully relaxing day.
4. Ask the students to look carefully at their finished stories and to identify those elements of each day over which they had control. To clarify, ask them: "Where did you contribute to your own stress?" "What did you do to create your own relaxation?"
5. Conduct a follow-up discussion focusing on how the students can exercise greater control over stress and avoid similar stresses in the future.

Managing and Handling Stress

Why

Sometimes students are not aware of the skills they already possess or of the potential resource people who surround them. Without identifying and examining their existing skills and resources, students may believe that they have little or no control—that things "just happen." Help your students identify their existing stress-management skills and tap into the skills of resource people.

How

1. Introduce the activity by asking your students to think about how they and other people they know handle stress (primarily distress).
2. To focus their thinking, talk about some of the ways *you* (and other people you know) handle stress.
3. Distribute the "Managing and Handling Stress" activity sheet, and give the students a few minutes to complete it.
4. Follow up with a review of the similarities and differences in the various ways people handle stress. During the discussion, point out particularly creative and promising techniques. Keep notes on the chalkboard.

Activity Sheet

Managing and Handling Stress

Take a look at how *you* handle stress. Then think about how *other people* you know handle stress. See how many similarities and differences you can find.

1. How do you handle stress?

_____

_____

_____

2. How does your teacher handle stress?

_____

_____

_____

3. How does your mom handle stress?

_____

_____

_____

4. How does your dad handle stress?

_____

_____

_____

(Continued on Next Page)

5. How does your best friend handle stress?

_____

_____

_____

6. How does someone else in your family handle stress?

_____

_____

_____

7. Have you sometimes handled stress the same way as someone you know handles it? How?

_____

_____

_____

8. What do you think is the best way to handle stress?

_____

_____

_____

Stress Alarm!

Why

Our bodies have strong physiological reactions when confronted with a stressor. All children have experienced most if not all the reactions, but probably have not associated them with stress. Completing this activity will give children an opportunity to make the connection between stressors and the body's responses.

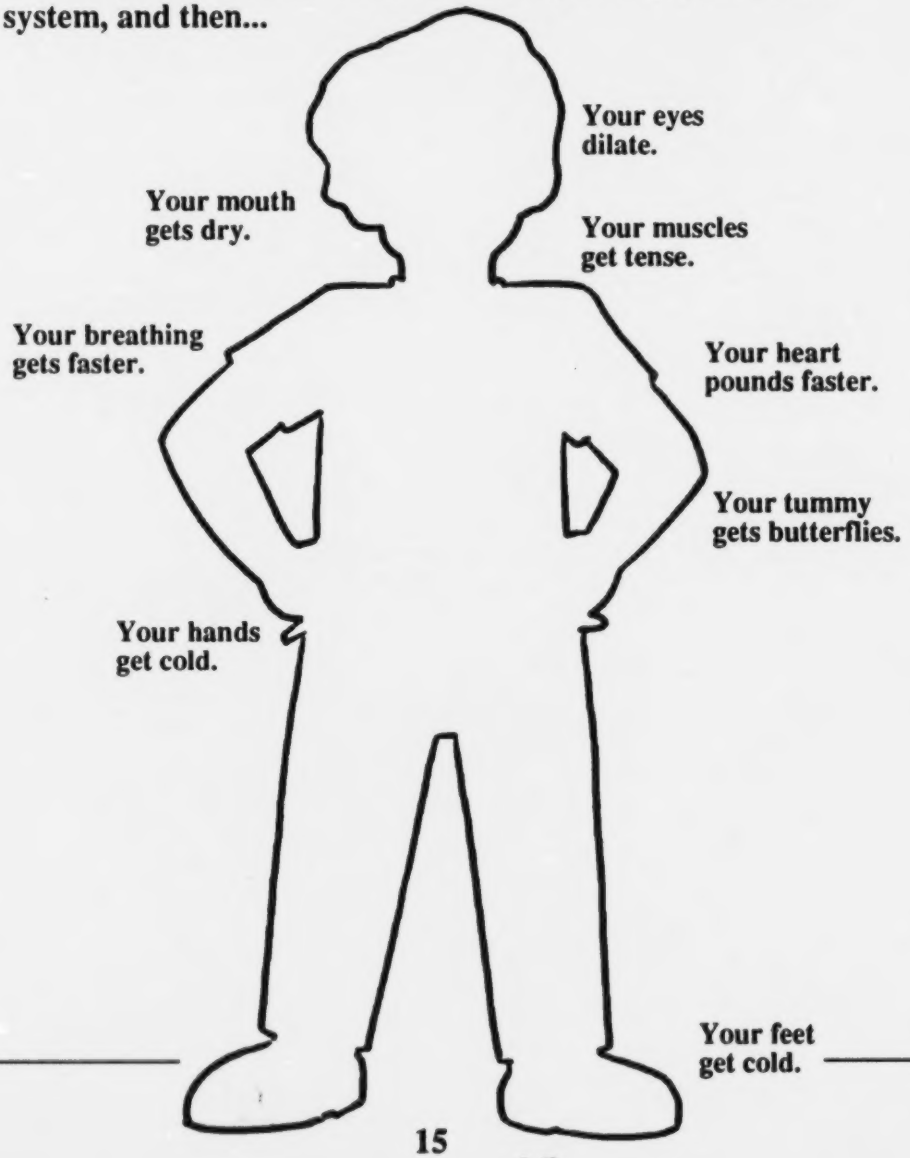
How

Distribute the "Stress Alarm!" activity sheet. Talk to the students about the ways in which the body reacts to stress. Then have them complete the drawing of the body on the activity sheet by illustrating the various reactions listed. For example, suggest that they draw big eyes, a puffing, panting mouth, a tummy full of butterflies, jittery hands, expanded lungs, and anything else they can think of. Encourage the students to use symbols and to be as creative as possible. Have the students share their completed drawings in small groups and then display them around the room.

Stress Alarm!

When you get scared or think you have a big problem, your **BRAIN** sends out signals that prepare your body to fight or to run away. See how many of these body reactions you can illustrate. Using symbols, draw the parts of the body reacting to stress.

First, a chemical called adrenaline speeds up your body system, and then...



Helper's File

Why

Students need to realize that when they experience stressful situations and difficult problems, they do not necessarily have to deal with them alone. There are many people both able and willing to assist children when they need help. Developing a trusted support group is one of the best ways to manage stress.

How

1. Give each student a copy of the "Helper's File" activity sheet.
2. Instruct the students to draw a line through any word that names an animal, place, number, thing, or toy. When these are crossed off, the names of possible resources will remain.
3. After the students have completed the activity sheet, reinforce the idea of seeking help by briefly discussing each resource that remains on the list.

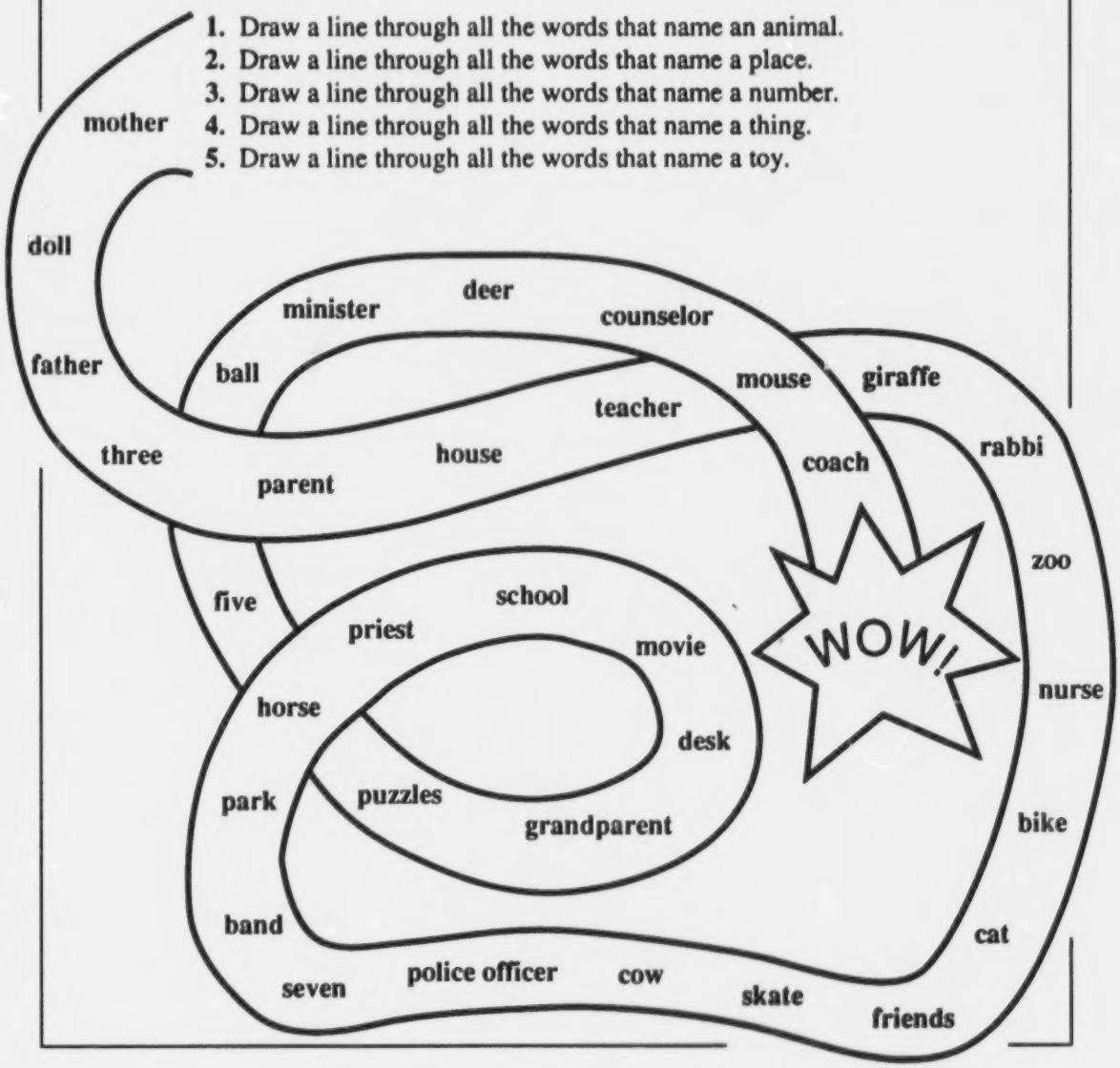
Activity Sheet

Helper's File

When you are upset or have a lot of stress, share your feelings with someone you trust. It helps!

Follow the directions below. The words that remain after you have completed steps 1 through 5 will suggest some ways to get help.

1. Draw a line through all the words that name an animal.
2. Draw a line through all the words that name a place.
3. Draw a line through all the words that name a number.
4. Draw a line through all the words that name a thing.
5. Draw a line through all the words that name a toy.



Anger and Worry

How to Control Internal Sources of Stress

Several students are talking in the back of the room while Helen presents a somewhat complicated lesson. She asks the students to pay attention. They comply for a few seconds—then start talking again. Her second and third requests are stronger but net the same results. Concern turns to annoyance, is multiplied by frustration, and erupts in anger. Helen reprimands the students loudly, and threatens to punish the entire class.

What caused Helen's anger? Not the students talking; Helen is an experienced teacher, accustomed to distractions. No, it was their *continuing* to talk after she had repeatedly asked them to stop that caused Helen to lose her temper. Helen's anger resulted from her awareness of the discrepancy between what she *wanted* (quiet and attention) and what she *got* (continued disruption, inattention, and disregard of her authority).

The Power of Expectations

Most of us get angry when we have an expectation that is not being met or when someone commits a transgression against rules that we expect to be observed. We become angry as a result of a real injury, or the *perception* that we have been or might be injured. Our anger can range from irritation or annoyance to fury and rage. Expressing anger not only allows us to vent strong feelings, it usually represents an attempt (consciously or unconsciously) to gain control over the situation or to get agreement that we are "right" (and the other person is "wrong") about the issue at hand.

Unlike many emotions, anger is difficult to hide. Helen's mental aggravation produced pronounced physical tension—and it showed. Her face became flushed, her breathing accelerated, at the height of her anger Helen's normally pleasant facial features became tight and contorted.

Manifestations and Reactions

Angry people strike out verbally, with accusations, sarcasm, even insults; physically, by slamming doors, throwing things, kicking furniture, or abusing others around them; or passively, by withdrawing into punishing silence.

Impulsive or aggressive behavior in response to anger is not uncom-

mon, particularly in children. You've probably observed many times the effects anger has on the receptivity of children to teaching and learning. Unbridled anger disrupts thinking and distorts behavior. It impairs a child's ability to make accurate judgments and to recall information. It can severely damage peer relations and lead to disciplinary action, delivering walloping blows to self-esteem.

Anger can produce positive effects, too. It can act as an energizer, relieve tension, offer new information, or aid students in regaining control.

Children are taught to ignore their anger. When they cannot ignore it, they are expected to control it, but they are rarely told *how*. Consciously or unconsciously, children realize that we all experience anger. On television, anger and violence are inexorably linked, yet we admonish children not to fight, physically or verbally.

How we react to an event we feel angry about depends on whether or not we perceive the situation as capable of being modified. Our anger may be less intense if we have some choice in the situation. Likewise, if we can discover a different explanation for the situation or through reasoning change its level of significance, our anger will subside.

If responding aggressively reinforces the belief that our anger is justified, we may strike out. If we hold the belief that showing anger is inappropriate, we probably will not express it openly. If we believe someone has intentionally tried to hurt us or that the motivation of the aggressor is arbitrary, unjustified, or selfish, our anger may be more intense. Physical condition plays a role, too. If we are hungry, tired, or experiencing a hormonal imbalance, we may be quicker to anger or anger more intensely.

Helping Students Control Anger

You can help students prepare for many anger-provoking situations. For example, you can ask them to examine their "hot buttons," things that have angered them in the past. With this information, they may be able to predict rather accurately the probability that the same things will provoke their anger in the future.

In order to manage their anger, students need to learn the difference between healthy and unhealthy anger. They need to choose more carefully the issues they want to take a stand on, acknowledge unhealthy anger and take responsibility for it. Students can learn to identify the cues that precede anger when anger is imminent. You can teach them

relaxation techniques to release muscle tension and to cope with the physical arousal of anger. You can help them develop better communication skills so that they can learn to express anger appropriately.

Students can use positive self-talk, relaxation, or humor to diffuse anger. They can learn what to say when their anger starts to bubble forth. Arguments are more often a question of *what* is right not *who* is right. Sometimes it is helpful to just let the other person run out of steam. Remind students that when others throw insults, they don't have to prove or defend themselves.

Self-Talk

Since it is so difficult for students to think positively when they are angry, they can be taught how to prepare in advance the things they want to say. Statements like, "Everything is cool," "I am calm," or "I am in control" remind students to relax when anger builds, and cope with anger when it starts to overwhelm. Once the anger passes, students can reward themselves by putting the situation in perspective with self-talk statements such as, "I'm doing better" or "I'm pleased with how I handled that."

Active Listening

One of the most difficult challenges relating to anger is knowing what to do when another person's anger is directed toward us. One way to respond when we are the target of anger is to *neutralize* or *diffuse* the anger. A communication strategy that accomplishes this very well is *active listening*.

Suppose Susan, angry at Manny for kicking her with the soccer ball, shouts, "Clumsy jerk, that's the last time I'll play with you!" Manny can choose to apologize, which may help the situation; however, he can diffuse Susan's anger even further by saying, "I can understand you're being mad at me. That was a hard kick. Your leg really must hurt." By paraphrasing Susan's words and "reading" the feelings conveyed by her nonverbal signals (facial expression, gestures, posture, etc.), Manny can neutralize or diffuse Susan's anger. If Manny's interpretation is inaccurate, Susan has an opportunity to correct him. She also has heard compelling evidence that Manny cares enough to at least try to understand her feelings.

By active listening, a student is not indicating agreement with the views of his or her opponent, only verifying that those views have been heard and understood. Active listening can play an important role in certain types of conflict resolution. Through active listening, both (or all)

sides of a conflict can be presented and understood. Alternative actions can be brainstormed and discussed, and a win-win resolution identified.

Anxiety: How Much Is Too Much?

Worry and anxiety are anticipatory responses to the *threat* of an event, rather than the event itself. Whether the event is real or imagined, its relative importance is reflected in the intensity of the anticipation. *Sam is mildly worried about the science test this afternoon, but he is extremely anxious about his Spanish test tomorrow. Jody, who because of her weight is often teased and ridiculed by other kids, experiences so much anxiety related to school that she becomes physically sick.*

In many cases, the feared event never happens. *Sam performs very well on both tests, and many days go by during which Jody is not teased at all.* In still other cases, the worried individual cannot identify the source of his or her anxiety. Such nonspecific threats usually create a vague, diffused anxiety that can be particularly hard to deal with. Examples are fear of the unknown, a general fear of failure, fear of unresolved problems, or uncertainty about a situation.

Characteristic of the physical arousal caused by worry and anxiety are tense muscles, cold clammy hands, shallow breathing, and/or shaking. Students who are worried find it difficult to concentrate, are restless, and may withdraw. In addition, an exaggerated focus on their own needs and expectations may make them quick to anger.

Anxiety is normal. When there is a real threat, it is an appropriate response. More often than not, however, much of what we agonize over never comes to pass or is far less terrible than we imagine it. Talk to students about this reality. Just knowing it is okay to feel anxious and worried can help students relax.

A little anxiety motivates us to perform better, and to more thoroughly prepare for a potentially threatening event, such as an interview, a speech, or a new class. Normal anxiety gives us an edge in doing our best. Abnormal anxiety inhibits our ability to function appropriately.

Helping Students Cope

We can help students deal with anxiety by showing them how to change their beliefs and their ways of thinking. We can teach them to examine the basis of the threat to determine if it is real or imagined, and to accurately judge its relative severity.

Students need to identify their negative self-talk and replace it with positive self-talk and imagery. As with other issues, learning to elicit a relaxation response through, for example, deep breathing can also reduce anxiety levels. Students can clear their minds and create a picture of dealing well with whatever confronts them. Exercise is also a viable way to deal with anxiety.

Anger Visualization

Why

Everyone experiences anger. Keeping anger corked inside is unhealthy and stressful. A positive strategy for handling anger is to accept the anger and respond to it in a way that is constructive rather than destructive.

How

Play soft, soothing music in the background so your voice can be heard easily. Ask the students to get into a comfortable position and close their eyes. Slowly read the following script, pausing frequently so that the students have adequate time for visualizing.

Breathe in deeply. (Pause.) Take several relaxing breaths and feel your tension fall away. (Pause.) Allow your imagination to help you recall a time when you were angry. (Pause.) The incident that produced your anger may have occurred recently or a long time ago. (Pause.) Think of a time when you were angry and upset. (Pause.) Put yourself in that moment. (Pause.) What do you see? ((Pause.) What do you hear? (Pause.) Can you remember what you said? (Pause.) Is there shouting? (Pause.) Or silence? (Pause.) What did you do? (Pause.) Did you hit? ...run? ...break something? ...say things you wish you hadn't? (Pause.) Now visualize the way you wish you had acted. (Pause.) Could you hit a pillow instead of someone? (Pause.) ...talk to a friend? (Pause.) ...write your feelings out? ...exercise? (Pause.) See yourself saying exactly the right thing at the right time. (Pause.) Tell yourself, "I have wonderful self-control." "I know many positive ways to handle anger." (Pause.) And now, as you gradually shift back to the present moment, allow these positive feelings and ideas to stay with you. (Pause.) You can call upon these skills anytime you choose. (Pause.) Notice that your breathing is becoming stronger as you gently open your eyes, feeling good in every way.

Ask several willing students to describe the anger-producing situations they visualized. Discuss how each volunteer could have handled his/her anger more effectively. Help the students distinguish between responses that are helpful and responses that tend to aggravate the situation.

Things I Get Angry About

Why

By taking a look at the people, conditions, and situations that tend to generate their anger, students can more easily think of appropriate ways to handle or express that anger.

How

Distribute the activity sheet, "Things I Get Angry About." Ask the students to think about and write down various conditions, situations, and people that cause them anger. Then, have the students list one or two appropriate ways of handling the anger in each situation.

Lead a follow-up discussion. Make the following points:

- Anger is a basic human emotion and is neither bad nor good.
- Sometimes anger serves a protective function.
- There are healthy and appropriate ways to deal with the anger we feel.
- Each of us is responsible for our own feelings and behavior.
- It is how we *react* to a situation, not the situation itself, that causes our anger and upset.

Activity Sheet

Things I Get Angry About

Many people react angrily to the same things—and people—over and over again. What about you? Are there certain things (such as not getting your way or not being listened to) that almost always upset you? List several people and situations that usually make you angry. Then list several things you can do to deal with your feelings of anger.

Situations and People	**What I Can Do About My Anger**

Anger Journal

Why

Keeping a journal in which they record their daily experiences with anger and related feelings can help students distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate responses to those feelings. Through the process of writing, students will likely discover better ways to express their angry feelings and realize that responses which are generally unacceptable are frequently ineffective as well.

How

Distribute several copies of the "Anger Journal" activity sheet to each student. Explain that the purpose of the sheet is to help the students discover how they respond to anger-provoking situations, and to more fully evaluate the consequences of their responses.

To get started, ask the students to individually think of a recent experience in which they became angry. Using that experience, have the students fill out one "Anger Journal" activity sheet. Think of an example from your own experience, too, only complete *your* journal questions on the chalkboard, using your example to walk the students through the process.

Encourage the students to complete an activity sheet each time they feel any type of anger over the next several weeks. Periodically conduct debriefing sessions to give the students an opportunity to share and discuss what they have learned.

Activity Sheet

Anger Journal

Each time you are in an anger-provoking situation, write down your responses to the following questions:

1. What is the anger-provoking situation?

_____

_____

2. What people are involved?

_____

_____

3. On a scale of 1-5, rate your anger.
   a. annoyed _____ b. exasperated _____ c. upset _____
   d. angry _____ e. irate _____

4. What do you typically say or do in response to this type of situation?

_____

_____

5. Is this response appropriate or inappropriate? Explain.

_____

_____

6. What are the possible consequences of your actions? Are your actions likely to change the situation so you get more of what you want? Why or why not?

_____

_____

Anger ABC's

Why

When students share information, they discover how they are alike and how they are different. They also have an opportunity to discover new and better ways of handling anger and other issues. This activity asks students to consider that their feelings are not caused by situations and events, but rather by the *thoughts* they have about those situations and events. The students practice substituting moderate thoughts for angry thoughts as one way of controlling feelings.

How

Using the "Anger ABC's" activity sheet, ask the students to record several **situations** in which they felt angry. Give them a few minutes to write down their ideas in column **A**. Then, as a way of sparking additional ideas, invite several students to share one example from their sheet.

For purposes of illustration, make a list on the chalkboard so everyone can follow along. Include examples like, "My mom won't let me go to the concert with my friends."

In column **B**, have the students record the **thoughts** they have about the situation. Examples might be: "She is just being mean." "She doesn't understand." "She never wants me to have any fun." "I'll show her."

In column **C**, have the students record the **feelings** they have in response to the situation. For example: "Miserable." "Absolutely furious." "Disappointed and frustrated." "Lonely." "Livid."

At this point, ask the students what they think causes their feelings. Many will likely say that the event in column **A** causes the feeling. Point out that their *thoughts* about the event (column **B**), not the event itself, cause the feelings. Thoroughly discuss this important concept.

(Continued on Next Page)

Ask for suggestions on how the statements in column **B** can be changed. Help the students rethink some of the situations, coming up with new thoughts such as: "She thinks she is looking out for my safety." "She has plans the night of the concert and wants me to be with the family." "There will be other concerts."

Help the students realize that by changing their thoughts about any event or situation, they can change their feelings. Situations do not cause feelings. The thoughts we have about situations cause the feelings. Further, no one *makes* us have a particular feeling. Through our thoughts, we *choose* our feelings.

Suggest that when students find themselves reacting to a situation more strongly than is necessary, they can improve their disposition by rethinking the situation.

Activity Sheet

Anger ABC's

A Situation	B Thoughts	C Feelings

Reverse Chair

Why

When they become angry, students often see only one of many possible points of view—their own. By placing themselves in the role of their adversary, students can begin to appreciate alternative perspectives, motivations, and behaviors. This broadened view can dissolve much of the anger and resentment associated with conflict.

How

This activity requires that each student have two chairs. The chairs should be placed so that they face each other. Lead the students through the following steps. After they have learned the process, they can easily replicate it at home. In your own words, say:

1. *Sit in one chair and face the other (empty) chair.*
2. *Imagine the person you are angry at seated opposite you, in the empty chair.*
3. *Tell the person in the empty chair the things he or she did that upset you. Use "I" messages or any other form of communication that will effectively express your feelings.*
4. *Now, switch chairs and imagine that you* ***are*** *the person with whom you are angry. For example, if you are angry at a friend,* ***become*** *the friend and speak from his or her point of view in response to what you just said.*
5. *Switch chairs and become yourself again. Respond from your own point of view.*

Circulate and coach the students as they continue their individual confrontations, playing both roles and switching chairs as they represent alternate points of view.

Focus a follow-up discussion on the importance of trying to understand not only one's own point of view but the views of others, particularly in conflict situations.

(Continued on Next Page)

Variation: Have the students imagine a worry or anxiety sitting in the empty chair. Encourage them to imagine the worry or anxiety having the form and features of a friendly monster. Then instruct the students to have a conversation with the monster, switching chairs and playing both roles. Encourage the students to ask the monster questions that will help them understand the worry. Follow the activity with a discussion.

Activities for Coping With Angry Feelings

Why

There are many positive and healthy ways to deal with anger. The more coping strategies students are aware of, the more choices they have, thus the greater their chance of responding appropriately when anger erupts.

How

Generate a discussion about how the students feel when they are angry. Ask questions such as:

— *How does your body feel when you are angry?*
— *What happens to your energy level?*
— *How well do you study? ...play? ...sleep?*

Ask the students to think of some ways they can appropriately express the energy that builds in them as a result of anger. Write their suggestions on the chalkboard and discuss. Include items such as:

- **ride a bike**
- **run**
- **dance**
- **skate board**
- **scream into a pillow**
- **shout (in an acceptable place)**
- **hit a stuffed toy**
- **jump rope**
- **swim**
- **skate**
- **punch a pillow**
- **cry**
- **write a letter and tear it up**
- **talk with a friend or trusted adult**

Divide the class into groups of three or four and have the groups brainstorm additional acceptable ways of dealing with anger. Ask each group to share two or three ideas with the class.

If time permits, have each group formulate three positive self-talk statements to aid in the control and release of angry feelings.

Worry and Control

Why

Most things students worry about never happen, or if they do happen, are not as bad as expected. This activity is designed to impress students with that reality.

How

Engage the students in a discussion of the kinds of things students worry about—getting sick or hurt, losing things, getting bad grades, not being liked, being rejected, abandoned, or left out.

Using the "Worry and Control" activity sheet, have the students list things that worry them in two columns—things they worry about and *can* control and things they worry about and *can't* control. (Some students may need help deciding whether or not they have control. The fear of receiving poor grades, for example, is a worry they *can* control by planning and studying. A pet's getting old and parents' divorcing are worries over which they have little or no control.)

Ask the students what they can do to resolve the troubling situations over which they have some control. Then ask what they can do to help themselves worry less about things over which they have little or no control. Help the students recognize that every action they take to resolve a worrisome situation reduces the anxiety they feel. Point out that taking charge will earn them a sense of power and agency. Emphasize too the importance of relieving wasted anxiety by acknowledging and "letting go" of issues over which they have little or no control.

Activity Sheet

Worry and Control

In the two columns below, list all the things you can think of that you worry about:

Things I Worry About and *Can* Control	**Things I Worry About and *Can't* Control**

What I can do about worries I *can* control:

What I can do to lessen my worry in situations I *can't* control:

For one week, keep track of all the things you worry about. At the end of the week, figure out how many of the things you were worried about actually happened and how many didn't happen.

Blow Those Worries Away

Why

"Don't worry" is a very common expression—one that is easier to say than to do. Students worry about many things. When the actual sources of their worries are examined, students are often less troubled. This activity simulates that process. Labeling their worries (on the balloons) and deliberately popping them, symbolizes the process of examining, labeling, and letting go of worry.

How

1. Give each student a supply of various colored balloons.
2. Ask the students to think about and identify things that they are worried about. Circulate and offer assistance, as needed.
3. Have the students write each worry on a slip of paper and place it inside a balloon before blowing *or* have them blow up and knot the balloons, and use a broad felt tip marker to write each worry on the outside of a different balloon.
4. Ceremoniously pop the balloons, "banishing the worries forever."

Nutrition

Start with Good Health

Good health relies on a balanced diet. Students need to eat foods that provide them with a variety of nutrients including proteins, carbohydrates, fats, minerals, vitamins, and water. They need servings daily from the four basic food groups: meat, fish, and poultry; fruits and vegetables; milk and/or milk products; and cereals/grains. When students deprive their bodies of basic nourishment, they run the risk of becoming deficient in essential nutrients and, as a consequence, more vulnerable to stress. The best way for students to ensure having a balanced diet is to eat recommended amounts of foods from the four basic food groups.

Food is the fuel of the body and exercise generates energy from that fuel. Ideally, food and exercise constitute a balanced system of energy intake and output. A varied, well-balanced diet is central to healthy living, ensuring both mind and body the opportunity to function at peak levels.

Stress imposes additional demands on the body. Under stress, the need for all nutrients, especially calcium and B vitamins is increased. Maintaining a proper diet is an important facet of managing stress. It is critical that students learn to make good eating habits a priority. By paying attention to what they eat, how they eat, and when they eat, they can significantly reduce their susceptibility to chronic stress.

Fast Finishes Last

Students can start by paying more attention to the quality of the food they eat and the way they eat it. Many students eat too fast and allow junk food to dominate their meals. Advertising influences students to buy the least nutritional foods rather than what is best for them. The best foods are fresh, simple, and nutritious. Sadly, about 25% of the average American diet consists of sugars and 45% of fats. The average person also consumes 5 pounds of chemicals a year. These are additives used by the food industry that do not occur naturally in the foods themselves.

Speed is another enemy of good nutrition. Students should realize the consequences to gulping down their food. First, the digestive process is curtailed and the proper mixture of food and digestive enzymes is not achieved. Digestion is incomplete. In addition, when students eat fast, they register only a few strong flavors—usually sweetness, saltiness, or

sourness. The more subtle flavors require a further breakdown of the food by digestive juices.

Clearly junk food has been intentionally designed to appeal to sugar- and salt-sensitive taste buds. When sugar and/or salt are major ingredients, eating fast leaves a residue of taste in the mouth that reinforces dependency on these ingredients.

When students eat slowly, they chew their food completely and consume about one-third less. Digestion takes place more efficiently. Hunger is satisfied more quickly and thoroughly, and therefore requires less intake. Not only should students eat slowly, but at appropriate times and places. Eating "on the run" is conducive neither to good digestion nor to stress reduction. Since students like the rest of us tend to find food pleasurable, mealtime offers an opportunity to relax and relieve stress. Eating as an activity should be leisurely and pleasant as well as nourishing.

Use the following guidelines as a basis for class discussion. Encourage students to add to this information through independent or team research and reports.

Seven Steps to Good Nutrition

1. Drink eight to ten 8-ounce glasses of water daily. Water is so essential to human survival that without it, life cannot be sustained more than a few hours. Humans can survive many times longer without food than they can without water. The body's circulatory system uses water to transport nutrients to cells, tissues, and organs. In addition, water plays a necessary role in temperature regulation, especially during extreme heat and heavy exercise. Water deficiency makes exercise more difficult and less beneficial. Severe water depletion during exercise can be dangerous, leading to heat stroke. In times of stress or pressure, drinking extra water helps alleviate dry mouth and heart palpitations, and replenishes water lost through perspiration.

2. Eat a variety of foods from the four basic food groups. Concentrate on increasing amounts of *whole* foods, such as raw or lightly steamed vegetables, fruits, brown rice, beans, dried peas, nuts, seeds, whole grains, and cereals. These foods are high in *complex carbohydrates*, which means they contain a complex mix of starch, fiber, sugar, vitamins, and minerals. Avoid highly refined simple carbohydrates, like candy and most other sweets, white flour, white rice, processed fruit products, overcooked vegetables, and sugar-coated cereals. These foods are higher in calories, but lower in nutrients. Complex carbohydrates provide a more sustained source of energy, supply more nutrients, and contain the added

benefits of fiber, which aids gastrointestinal functioning.

3. Limit fats to 25% of daily caloric intake. The typical American diet consists of far too much fat—about 45%. The fats in meat and dairy products are doubly troublesome since they also contain high amounts of artery-clogging cholesterol. Eat more fish and poultry (cooked without the skin). Choose lean trimmed cuts when preparing red meats. Select nonfat dairy products and use fat-free salad dressings.

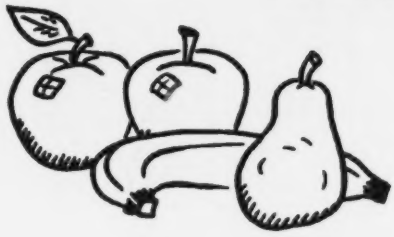
4. Eat less sugar. Sugar contains no fiber, vitamins, minerals, or starch. The calories obtained from sugar are devoid of other nutrients and can disturb blood-sugar levels in some people. Choose fresh fruit whose natural sugars metabolize without producing the energy-sapping roller-coaster effect frequently caused by candy and other sweets.

5. Eat less sodium. Salt is sodium chloride—40% sodium and 60% chloride. Americans typically eat far more sodium than they need. While excess sodium is routinely excreted from the body through the action of healthy kidneys, some people are "salt sensitive;" their kidneys do not efficiently and effectively eliminate excess sodium. This causes water retention and may contribute to hypertension (high blood pressure). About one-third of the sodium in the typical American diet comes from processed foods, such as canned and ready-to-eat foods, soups, cheeses, luncheon meats, snack foods, condiments, sauces, frozen dinners, and processed meats. Another third is added from the salt shaker while cooking and at the table. The remaining third is found naturally in foods and in some medicines. Many people proudly claim that they never add salt to their food, but persist in eating highly processed, sodium-laden foods. The most effective way to reduce sodium in the diet is to drastically cut back on processed foods.

6. Restrict caffeine. Caffeine is a mild stimulant drug found in coffee, tea, certain soft drinks (particularly colas), chocolate, and some medications. Caffeine artificially stimulates the body's "fight or flight" response, causing feelings of stress. Caffeine raises the metabolic rate, stimulates the heart, dilates coronary arteries, constricts cerebral blood flow, and relaxes muscles of the respiratory system, the digestive tract, and the kidney. From a nutritional perspective, caffeine adds nothing while depleting stores of B vitamins, potassium, and magnesium.

7. Eat frequent, small meals. Skipping meals or having one or two large meals each day overburdens the digestive system and leaves the body depleted of energy during long periods of abstinence. Having three smaller meals with nutritious snacks in between provides the body with a continuous source of energy and is easier on the digestive system.

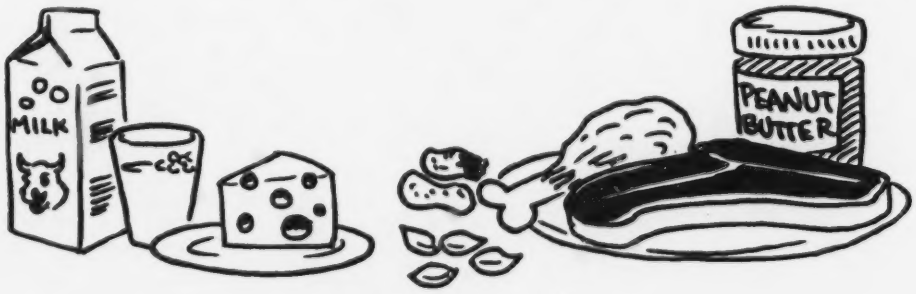
Activity Sheet



Nutrition Information

Ideal Servings Per Day

Number of Servings	Food Group	Serving Size
4	vegetables/fruits	1/2 cup, or 1 apple, 1 orange 1 banana, medium potato
4	breads/cereals/pasta	1 slice bread, 3/4 cup cereal 1 tortilla
2-4	milk, cheese, yogurt	1 cup milk, 1 medium slice of cheese
2	meat, poultry, fish, eggs, beans, nuts	2-3 oz lean meat, poultry, fish, 2 eggs, 1 1/4 cup cooked beans, 4 tablespoons peanut butter, 3/4 cup nuts



Menu Planning

Why

Students need to practice giving some thought to their meals and snacks so they can have the energy they need for optimum health. By being aware of what constitutes appropriate servings of the four food groups, students will find it is easier to eat a balanced diet. In addition, if they learn to stick to the food groups and suggested serving sizes, few will experience problems with their weight.

How

Distribute the "Menu Planning" activity sheet and the "Nutrition Information" activity sheet. Have the students form pairs. Taking into consideration the recommended servings per day, have the partners help each other plan a carefully balanced menu, complete with snacks. In a follow-up discussion, invite several of the students to tell the class about their favorite meal.

Activity Sheet

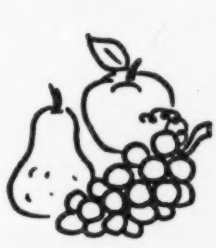
Menu Planning

Plan all of your meals and snacks for one day. Include appropriate servings from each of the four food groups. You'll find that information on your "Nutrition Information" sheet.

	Breakfast	**Snack**
Meat/Beans	_____	_____
Fruits/Vegetables	_____	_____
Breads/Cereals	_____	_____
Milk/Cheese	_____	_____

	Lunch	**Snack**
Meat/Beans	_____	_____
Fruits/Vegetables	_____	_____
Breads/Cereals	_____	_____
Milk/Cheese	_____	_____

	Dinner	**Snack**
Meat/Beans	_____	_____
Fruits/Vegetables	_____	_____
Breads/Cereals	_____	_____
Milk/Cheese	_____	_____



Start, Stop, Continue

Why

When students know which foods are good for them and which ones are not, they can begin to make decisions that lead to healthier eating habits.

How

Engage the students in a brief discussion about their eating habits. Specifically, ask them to mention the foods they may not presently be eating or eating in sufficient amounts, like green leafy vegetables, fruits, and whole-grain cereals. Then ask them to talk about the foods they eat too much of, like burgers, chips, or candy. Distribute the "Start, Stop, Continue" activity sheet and go over the directions. Have the students work in pairs or triads to complete the sheet. In a follow-up discussion, reinforce healthy choices already being made by the students, and brainstorm ways of incorporating foods that the students listed in their "Start" column.

Activity Sheet

Start, Stop, Continue

Directions: Think carefully about your own eating habits—particularly snacks and other foods you tend to eat a lot of. Decide which foods (from the 4 food groups) you need to *start* eating or eat *more of*, which foods you should *stop* eating or eat *less of*, and which foods you can *continue* to eat—because they are good for you. Now make a list of each.

START

STOP

CONTINUE

Snacking

Why

When snacks provide needed energy, they contribute significantly to nutrition and health. Snacks are particularly important for students who have irregular eating habits or for whom meals are more than four to five hours apart. The best snacking strategy is to choose snacks that are nutritious, consisting of more fresh foods and less salt, fat and sugar. Snacks ought to provide vitamins, minerals, fiber, and protein. Snacks are not "extras," but rather important components of a student's diet.

When

This activity should be preceded by the "Menu Planning" activity so that students can see how snacks fit within overall menu and nutrition planning.

How

Explain to the students that since snacking often occurs spontaneously, it is important to plan ahead and prepare for the "snack attack." In certain situations healthy snacking is difficult, and the students should be prepared to adjust their diet accordingly at regular meals. When they snack wisely, students will always have sufficient energy when they need it, without compromising nutrition.

Ask the students to help you brainstorm a list of nutritious snacks. Write suggestions on the chalkboard. For example, plain popcorn, whole-grain crackers, unsweetened fruit juices, fresh fruits and vegetables, plain low-fat yogurt and lower-fat, lower-sodium cheeses, fresh or dried fruit, breadsticks and salt-free pretzels.

Using the "Snacking" activity sheet, have the students select snacks for one week and list them in the spaces indicated.

Activity Sheet

Snacking

Plan nutritious snacks for five days.

Monday

Mid-morning _____

Afternoon _____

Evening _____

Tuesday

Mid-morning _____

Afternoon _____

Evening _____

Wednesday

Mid-morning _____

Afternoon _____

Evening _____

Thursday

Mid-morning _____

Afternoon _____

Evening _____

Friday

Mid-morning _____

Afternoon _____

Evening _____

Personal Food Review

Why

By comparing what they actually eat with what they know is good for them, students can see where they need to make adjustments in order to plan a healthier diet.

How

Ask the students to think back over the last 24 hours and to recall what they have eaten during that period.

Ask them to write down everything they have eaten and compare it with the appropriate food groups and servings sizes listed on the "Nutritional Information" activity sheet.

Using a calorie count (found in most cook books or diet/nutrition books), have the students calculate the number of calories they consumed during the last 24 hours. Ask volunteers to share their results, drawing attention to any striking differences in quantity of food consumed relative to calories. For example, a student who eats fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fish, and nonfat milk will be able to eat much more food for a given number of calories than a student who eats hamburgers, fries, cinnamon rolls, and pizza.

Read the Label

Why

In order to know how to make better choices from among prepared and packaged foods, students must develop the habit of reading labels. Labels often state the amount of sodium, calories, sugar, additives, fat, etc. found *per* serving in a can or package. If students don't read carefully, they may consume more fat, sodium, and calories than they would like.

How

Bring to school a variety of labels from cans and packages, including so-called diet varieties that are advertised as low fat and low sodium.

Have the students read the labels carefully and calculate how many calories, grams of fat, and grams of sodium are in the package. For example, a popular brand of 11 1/2-ounce bean-with-bacon soup contains 2 7/8 servings. So when the label says that calories are 140 *per serving*, if the students multiply the servings by 3, they will find that a single can contains nearly 420 calories. The same can contains 840 milligrams of sodium *per serving* so the can contains nearly 2,520 mg. of sodium. The fat content is 5 grams *per serving*. One gram of fat is equivalent to nine calories.

To find out the percentage of calories derived from fat, have the students multiply 9 X 5 grams which equals 45 grams. Then multiply 45 X 3 servings equals 135 grams. Finally, divide 135 by the total number of calories (420) to discover that 32% of the calories—almost one third—is derived from fat.

The American Heart Association states that no more than 10 to 20 percent of a healthy diet is derived from fat. Ingredients on labels are listed by weight. On the can of soup, ingredients read "cooked white beans, water, tomatoes, bacon, carrots, modified food starch, salt, sugar, dehydrated onions, monosodium glutamate, yeast extract, and smoke flavoring." Point out that students could consume many more substantial, tasty, and nutritious foods for the amount of calories, sodium, and fat contained in one can of commercially-prepared soup.

Formulate questions based on the labels you have brought in for inspection. Concentrate on directing the attention of students to the nutritious properties of many of the foods they consume.

Taste Buds Experiment

Why

This experiment allows students to discover the potential they have for tasting foods beyond the quick fix of sweet, salty, and sour. It also encourages the use of more whole-grain products and other nutritious foods.

How

For this experiment, you need to obtain two types of bread—a fluffy white bread made from highly refined enriched white flour with artificial additives, and a whole-grain bread made without any additives or preservatives. Every student will need a bite-sized piece of each type of bread and a small cup of water.

First, have the students rinse their mouths with water. Then, in your own words, give the students these directions: *Take a piece of the white bread and carefully smell it. Put the bread in your mouth and chew it slowly until it becomes liquid. (The students may want to spit it out, as it will not taste good.) Rinse your mouth again and repeat the process with the whole grain bread. Be sure to smell the bread carefully before taking a bite and to chew it slowly until it liquifies.*

Ask the students: *What does your taste and smell tell you about which bread you should be eating?*

Pass the bread wrappers around the class, so that the students can read the ingredients in both types of bread. Discuss how the taste buds respond to the chemicals and additives in the processed bread as opposed to the natural ingredients in the unprocessed bread.

If you like, replicate this experiment using a snack food such as

Exercise

Sweat It Out!

There are many good reasons why students should be encouraged to develop the habit of regular exercise while they are young. In addition to the well documented cardiovascular and musculature benefits, regular aerobic exercise helps keep body fat at acceptable levels, improves appearance, and enhances self-esteem. In addition, exercise—particularly aerobic exercise—is a superb stress reducer.

When we *perceive* danger, our nervous system prepares us for the fight or flight response. Our muscles tense, our blood pressure and heart rate rise, and a release of adrenaline increases our alertness. Then we wait for the danger to materialize and most of the time nothing happens. Nothing to run from and certainly nothing to fight. So the tension and adrenaline stay in our system and, unless we have some way of releasing them, may accumulate more rapidly than they dissipate. Over time this effect can drain our energies and place a serious strain on our body, resulting in a variety of stress-related physical- and mental-health problems.

All of this is as true of students as it is of salespeople, fire fighters, advertising executives, and plumbers. The sources of stress may be different, but the reactions are the same. However, if students become active and exercise regularly, they can and will experience relief from stress. Exercise allows the body to respond to its heightened state of readiness by giving it a physical challenge—allowing muscles to contract and relax, requiring deeper, faster breathing, and expending excess energy. In addition, during exercise the mind tends to shift its focus from the source of stress to the activity itself. And for a pleasurable finale, the brain orders the release of an abundance of *endorphins*, a morphine-like chemical substance that dulls pain and promotes a natural sense of well being.

After exercise, the body relaxes and experiences the opposite of the fight or flight response. Heart rate and breathing slow, blood pressure drops, and muscle tension lessens. At this point, the mind becomes relaxed and highly receptive to mental focusing. In fact, when we exercise and then rush off to class, work, or another activity, we miss the opportunity to increase the benefits of exercise by combining it with a relaxation activity. The mental focus afforded by techniques such as deep breathing, progressive relaxation, visualization, and meditation multiplies

the benefits of exercise by facilitating a natural release of tension and guiding the mind to a deeper relaxed state.

Most students are aware that exercise is good for their physical health; substantially fewer recognize the benefits to psychological health. Here is a comprehensive look at all the advantages:

Physiological Benefits

- Improves the functioning of the circulatory system and lungs so that oxygen and food transportation to the cells is facilitated.
- Increases physical endurance.
- Lowers blood pressure.
- Increases lung elasticity and expansion, allowing more oxygen intake with each breath.
- Accelerates the speed and efficiency of food absorption.
- Lowers pulse rate.
- Strengthens the heart muscle by exercising it.
- Tones muscles.
- Improves physical appearance and posture.
- Speeds the body's ability to recover from strenuous activity.
- Slows the aging process.
- Reduces excess body fat by burning calories.
- Increases good cholesterol (HDL's).
- Reduces the incidence of illness and injury.

Psychological Benefits

- Increases self-esteem.
- Increases alertness.
- Improves concentration and mental agility.
- Improves the quality of sleep.
- Enhances image in the eyes of others.
- Reduces incidences of depression and anxiety.
- Improves attitudes toward work.
- Increases the ability to manage stress.

When students are physically fit, they can do their work and have sufficient energy left over for extracurricular and recreational activities. Or perhaps more important, they can meet, play, compete, and socialize, and still have energy enough to study. Fitness can be defined as having a combination of muscular strength and endurance, flexibility and agility, cardiovascular and respiratory endurance, and a healthy proportion of lean body mass to body fat.

Cardiovascular fitness is the ability of the heart and lungs to take in and use oxygen. Aerobic exercise increases and maintains cardiovascular fitness. Dancing, swimming, biking, rowing, jogging, and brisk walking are examples of aerobic exercise.

Muscular strength is the ability of the muscles to apply or exert force. Weight training (or "lifting") builds and maintains muscle mass and strength.

Muscle endurance is the ability of the muscles to continue an activity over a period of time without fatigue. Good endurance allows a person to exercise longer and is particularly helpful in activities such as long-distance walking or running, cross country skiing, soccer, and basketball.

Flexibility is the ability to move the muscles to their full extent, without strain. Flexible muscles are the best guard against muscle pulls and strains, and lower back injuries. Stretching should be a part of both the warm-up and cool-down phases of all fitness programs. Flexibility is of utmost importance in activities like gymnastics, karate, judo, and ballet.

Even though they are young and otherwise healthy, students who are unaccustomed to aerobic exercise should display caution when beginning an exercise program. If in doubt about a student's readiness, refer the student to his or her physician for approval. Urge students to begin slowly by participating in enjoyable activities, such as biking or walking in beautiful natural surroundings, or other high-interest athletic pursuits. Time and intensity can be increased gradually as endurance builds.

Encourage students to develop the habit of stretching, and of warming up and cooling down. Remind them to be aware of their personal limits—pain is not gain! Many fitness programs fail because they begin at levels that are too ambitious. If students exhaust or injure themselves, they may be tempted to give up. They should feel energized following exercise; if they don't, they are trying too hard.

A well designed exercise program will give students the energy to do all the activities they enjoy as well as acting as nature's best tranquilizer. Exercise won't eliminate all stress, but it is a deeply relaxing and powerfully life-affirming enterprise. It can proffer to students both physical fitness and a sense of control over their lives.

Health Inventory

Why

Knowing what their present condition is will make it easier for students to see what they need to do in order to improve and reach goals.

How

1. Distribute the "Health Inventory" activity sheet and go over the directions with the students.
2. Have the students complete the sheet while you complete one, too.
3. Discuss the results. If time permits, demonstrate how an item with a "—" rating can be turned into a goal.

Activity Sheet

Health Inventory

Circle one number for each statement. Circle **5** if the description is perfect; **4** if it is mostly true, **3** if it is somewhat true, **2** if it is mostly untrue, and **1** if it is not true at all.

Circle One	Read Carefully	+ or —
1 2 3 4 5	1. I eat a balanced diet.	
1 2 3 4 5	2. My weight is about right for me.	
1 2 3 4 5	3. I engage in a regular exercise program.	
1 2 3 4 5	4. I have an abundance of energy.	
1 2 3 4 5	5. I don't pay much attention to my physical development.	
1 2 3 4 5	6. I have specific goals related to physical fitness.	
1 2 3 4 5	7. I get adequate rest.	
1 2 3 4 5	8. I sleep well at night.	
1 2 3 4 5	9. I have regular physical checkups.	
1 2 3 4 5	10. I often have indigestion.	
1 2 3 4 5	11. I often eat fast.	
1 2 3 4 5	12. I often eat at fast food restaurants.	
1 2 3 4 5	13. I often stay up very late.	
1 2 3 4 5	14. I tire easily.	
1 2 3 4 5	15. I understand it takes good physical health to achieve other goals in life.	
1 2 3 4 5	18. I am frequently sick.	
1 2 3 4 5	19. I often experience tension in my family or social life.	
1 2 3 4 5	20. I am in better physical shape than the average person my age.	
1 2 3 4 5	21. I always fasten my seat belt.	
1 2 3 4 5	22. I usually follow rules of safety.	
1 2 3 4 5	23. I have made a conscious effort to reduce sodium, fat, and sugar in my diet.	

Go back and review your ratings, one at a time. In the right-hand column, put a + if you are pleased with your rating. Put a — if you would like to improve in the area described.

What general statements can you make about your health? Ask your teacher, a parent, or a friend to help you write goals for areas in which you want to improve.

Lifetime Fitness

Why

Exercise builds muscles and strengthens heart/lung capacity and endurance. Exercise is an effective stress reducer, promotes increased levels of energy, and improves health, longevity, appearance, self-image, and self-esteem. In students, physical fitness can facilitate the accomplishment of academic and personal goals. To reach their full potential, students should engage in rigorous physical activity on a regular basis.

How

Talk to the students about the benefits of finding a physical activity they enjoy and following through in a way that develops lifelong physical fitness. Involve the students in a discussion of fitness and exercise. On the chalkboard write the headings, "**Cardiovascular Fitness**," "**Muscular Strength**," "**Muscular Endurance**" and "**Flexibility**." Using the "Exercise and Fitness Information Sheet" as a resource, discuss each term, jotting notes on the board.

Explain that three components are necessary to establish a fitness program. Suggest that the students use the acronym **FIT** as an easy way to remember *how often* (**F**=frequency), *how hard* (**I**=intensity) and *for how long* (**T**=time) to exercise.

Discuss the following information with the students:

Frequency: Simply to maintain a good fitness level requires three sessions of aerobic activity a week. If a person wants to improve his or her level of fitness, more time is required.

Intensity: Intensity is measured in heartbeats per minute and is monitored during exercise by checking pulse rate. Every person has a "working" heart rate range, which is calculated based on resting heart rate and age. Within that range, higher heart rates during exercise build cardiovascular fitness; lower heart rates (usually about 140/minute) are best for burning fat.

Time: To obtain maximum benefits from physical activity, heart rate must be maintained within an individual's working range nonstop for 20 to 30 minutes during each period of exercise. Warming up and cooling down for several minutes before and after aerobic exercise (for example, with stretching, hand-held weights, and abdominal exercises) further maximizes benefits and helps guard against injuries.

Activity Sheet

FIT for Life

The formula for fitness: FIT equals 3 sessions of aerobic activity per week, 20 to 30 minutes in the working heart-rate range during each session. Spread out the three sessions with a day or more of rest in between.

Exercising within your working heart-rate range is the way to gain maximum cardiovascular and/or fat-burning benefits.

To calculate your *maximum* heart-rate:

Subtract your age from 220

Example: Sheila is 35 years of age: 220 - 35 = 185 beats per minute

Fill in the blanks and calculate your maximum heart rate:

220 - _____ = _____ beats per minute

Your target heart rate range is 70 percent to 85 percent of your maximum heart rate. Using the example above:

70 percent of 185 (maximum heart rate) equals 130 beats per minute.

(.70 x 185 = 130)

85 percent of 185 (maximum heart rate) equals 157 beats per minute.

(.85 x 185 = 157)

The example's working heart-rate range is between 130 and 157 beats per minute.

Now fill in the blanks and calculate your own working range:

.70 x _____ = _____ beats per minute.

.85 x _____ = _____ beats per minute.

During exercise, your heart rate should remain in your working heart-rate range for 20 to 30 minutes.

Taking Your Pulse Rate

Why

Exercise that increases student heart rate to within the working heart-rate range offers the most heart and lung benefits. By knowing what their working range is and how to take their pulse rate, both resting and active, students will be able to exercise to their best advantage.

How

Time the students as they measure their pulse rate while seated quietly at their desks. Using a timer, have the students find their pulse and count the beats for 6 seconds. Multiply the count by 10 to get the total number of beats per minute. This is a resting pulse rate. Have the students record the resting rate on their "Taking Your Pulse Rate" activity sheet.

Next, have the students stand and run in place for one minute. Immediately time the students while they measure their pulse rate again for 6 seconds. Direct them to multiply the number of beats by 10 and record.

Have the students continue to run in place for 10 minutes. Every 2 minutes, stop the students and take another 6-second heart rate. Multiply and record.

Have the students complete their activity sheets. Then facilitate a discussion, making these points:

- If the total beats per minute fall within the working range, the activity level is on target.
- If the number falls below the working range, the student is not working hard enough and needs to step up his or her efforts.
- If the number is higher, the student is working too hard and should slow down.

Activity Sheet

Taking Your Pulse Rate

Directions: Your teacher will time you during exercise. After each 2-minute period of exercise, you will be asked to measure your pulse. Record the measurements below.

1. Record your resting pulse rate: _____
2. Stand and run in place for one minute.
3. Immediately take your pulse rate and record here: _____
4. Record your pulse rate during ten minutes of exercise at intervals of two minutes. Your teacher will time you.

Heart rate after 2 minutes of exercise: _____

. . . after 4 minutes: _____

. . . after 6 minutes: _____

. . . after 8 minutes: _____

. . . after 10 minutes: _____

Pulse rate *before* exercise: _____

Pulse rate *immediately after* exercise: _____

Pulse rate *10 minutes* after exercise: _____

My working heart-rate range is: _____ to _____

I exercised within my working heart-rate range: ____yes ____no

An activity I enjoy that allows me to exercise within my range is:

_____

_____

Information Sheet

Exercise and Fitness

Cardiovascular Fitness: The ability of the heart and lungs to take in and use oxygen. Aerobic exercises increase and maintain cardiovascular fitness. Dancing, swimming, biking, rowing, jogging, and brisk walking are examples of aerobic exercise.

Muscular Strength: The ability of the muscles to apply or exert force. Weight training (or "lifting") builds and maintains muscle mass and strength.

Muscle Endurance: The ability of the muscles to continue an activity over a period of time without fatigue. Good endurance allows a person to exercise longer and is particularly helpful in activities such as long-distance walking or running, cross country skiing, soccer, and basketball.

Flexibility: The ability to move the muscles to their full extent, without strain. Flexible muscles are the best guard against muscle pulls and strains, and lower back injuries. Stretching should be a part of both the warm up and cool down phases of all fitness programs. Flexibility is of utmost importance in activities like gymnastics, karate, judo, and ballet.

Action Plan for Fitness

Why

Without a plan, students are less likely to achieve their fitness goals. To insure their success, it is wise to help students devise a formal plan, in the process looking at the issues that could jeopardize their ability to follow through.

How

Distribute the "Action Plan for Fitness" activity sheet. Have the students write down one *specific* fitness goal. For example, "to walk two miles, three times a week," or "to jog three miles every other morning on the school track."

Explain that roadblocks are any conditions or events that might prevent students from achieving their goal. Typical roadblocks to regular exercise are finding the time, weather conditions, lack of motivation, not liking to exercise alone, etc.

Working in pairs, have the students brainstorm ways to overcome each of their roadblocks. Solutions might include such things as scheduling exercise time on a calendar, getting up earlier, obtaining clothing for various weather conditions, finding one or two companions to exercise with, etc.

Point out that once the roadblocks are removed, the goal can be reached more easily—but *not* automatically. A plan must be developed with specific steps that lead the student toward his or her goal. For example, a student planning to begin a regular walking program might start by making a firm commitment to follow through, then buy proper walking shoes, mark off the required time blocks on a calendar, and set the alarm clock, if necessary. In addition, the student might decide to utilize positive self-talk by saying words of encouragement like, "I feel good when I walk," "Walking is good exercise," "I'm proud of myself for walking three times a week," or "I am taking good care of myself."

Suggest that the students identify a reward that is realistic (is available and can be afforded), and is very desirable (highly motivating). Particularly helpful are rewards that promote continued perseverance in the exercise program.

Activity Sheet

Action Plan for Fitness

My fitness goal is:

_____

_____

Roadblocks to achieving my goal are:

_____

_____

Steps I can take to eliminate the roadblocks are:

_____

_____

Specific steps in my plan to achieve this goal are:

_____

_____

Positive self-talk statements I can use to encourage myself are:

_____

_____

My reward to myself for achieving my fitness goal for one month is: _____

_____

_____

Stretching Visualization (elementary)

Why

Stretching contributes to flexibility. Combining stretching with visualization allows students to practice two good stress-reduction techniques.

How

If you wish, play soft, soothing music in the background as you lead the students in this simple, brief stretching visualization.

Tell the students to stand in comfortable position where they will not bump into desks, chairs, or one another. Say: *Stand comfortably, with your feet approximately shoulder-width apart. Imagine that you are in a beautiful fruit orchard. (Pause.) There are many, many fruit trees here. In front of you is your very favorite fruit tree. (Pause.) Slowly reach up with one arm and stretch as far as you can to reach a piece of the fruit. (Pause.) Lift your opposite heel off the ground as you are stretching. (Pause.) Pretend you are reaching for a plump, ripe, juicy orange, apple, peach, or other fruit. (Pause.) Now, reach with your other arm to pick another piece of fruit that is just a bit further away, so you much really stretch. (Pause.) As you are stretching, lift your opposing heel off the ground. This gives you just enough lift to reach that luscious piece of your favorite fruit. (Pause.) Gently and slowly take those pieces of fruit and lay them on the ground in front of you, flexing your knees slightly as you bend. (Pause.) Reach and pick again. This time stretch even further to get the best looking piece of fruit. (Pause.) Shift your reaching from arm to arm, always lifting the opposite heel while keeping your toe on the ground. (Pause.) After every few reaches, lay the fruit on the ground. (Pause.) Now, pick up a piece of your favorite fruit and take a big bite. (Pause.) Enjoy the taste. It is sweet and juicy and good for your body. (Pause.) As you eat the fruit, say to yourself, "I feel so good." (Pause.) "This fruit is good for me." (Pause.) "I love to eat foods that are healthy." After you have picked one more beautiful piece of fruit, stretching as far as you possibly can, pick up your fruit and take your seat.*

Mixed Up Things to Do

Why

Exercise is good for releasing stress as well as for general health and well being. This is a fun way for students to identify some of the many enjoyable activities that contribute to general fitness.

How

Using the "Mixed Up Things To Do" activity sheet, have the students decode the coded message.

After they have written two of their favorite exercises in code, suggest that they exchange papers with a partner and practice decoding again to discover the activities their partner enjoys.

Conduct a brief follow-up discussion, focusing on the exercise benefits of some favorite activities.

Mixed Up Things To Do

You can do many things to keep your body flexible and strong.

Decode the following message to find out what some of those things are. Use the small letters in the bottom row to decode the capital letters.

Example: IFMMRMT is "running"

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
z y x w v u t s r q p o n m l k j i h g f e d c b a

I can go for a _____, or I can _____
DZOP **IRWV**

my _____. I might want to _____
YRPV **QFNK**

_____. If it's hot I can _____.
ILKV **HDRN**

_____ is fun and _____
TBNMZHGRXH **HPZGRMT**

is fast-moving fun.

Think of two more exercises you enjoy and write them in code:

_____

_____

Decode this message:

_____
VCVIXRHV RH UFM!

Relaxation

Several Roads to Serenity

The Western world has only recently begun to recognize the benefits of a technology the Eastern world has employed and enjoyed for centuries. Relaxation techniques involving meditation, progressive relaxation, visualization and special breathing can intervene powerfully between stress and illness or disease. Systematic relaxation can change physiological processes and, when practiced regularly, has been shown to lower blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension, and serum cholesterol. The techniques are simple to learn, however they do require self-discipline and regular investments of time.

Many of your students have probably been told that relaxation is good for them. But have they been told *how* to relax? Everyday activities may leave them tense and bracing their muscles for actions they never take. Try this: Without warning, have your students stop in the middle of an activity. Then ask them to notice where and how they are bracing or tensing their muscles. You try it, too.

When we check ourselves, we often discover a clamped jaw, an overly tight grip on our pencil, pen, or other tool, and rigid tension in our neck and shoulders. Readied for action that is subsequently aborted, we continue to use an intensified degree of muscular contraction—much more than is necessary. It is not surprising that we experience backaches, headaches, and neck and shoulder pain.

Progressive Relaxation

Dr. Edmund Jacobson developed a technique to induce nerve-muscle relaxation in hospital patients. He called the technique *progressive relaxation*. Jacobson taught his patients a series of exercises that required them to contract specific muscle groups—then relax them. He progressed his patients from one muscle group to another. By contracting the muscles before relaxing them, patients were able to recognize what muscle tension felt like. Once familiar with the sensation of tension, the patients could voluntarily induce relaxation.

Dr. Jacobson measured the amount of electrical activity produced in muscle fibers when people had residual tension, even during times when they appeared to be relaxed. He discovered that this systematic way of controlling muscle tension produced profound relaxation. The relaxation

was pleasant and left patients feeling refreshed. Dr. Jacobson believed that tense muscles contributed to tense minds, and that if individuals could induce physical relaxation, mental relaxation would follow.

Progressive relaxation requires neither special equipment nor a vivid imagination, and offers both physiological and psychological benefits. The technique has been used to treat a variety of conditions ranging from migraines to backaches.

Practicing progressive muscle relaxation reduces pulse rate and blood pressure and decreases perspiration and respiration. It is based on the premise that the body responds to anxiety-provoking thoughts and events with muscle tension. While psychological tension *increases* the anxiety, deep muscle relaxation works directly to reduce physiological tension and is thus incompatible with anxiety. The habit of responding with one blocks the habit of responding with the other.

By practicing progressive relaxation, students can become more aware of their muscle groups and recognize specific areas where tension is a problem. To reap the full benefits of progressive relaxation, students will have to practice the technique regularly; however, this needn't be a deterrent. Tensing and relaxing a single "problem" muscle group takes only moments. Nevertheless, the first few times you teach the technique, strive for an environment that is quiet and relatively free of distractions.

Breathing

Various breathing exercises have proven effective in reducing anxiety, irritability, muscular tension, fatigue, and depression. Dr. Herbert Benson, in his book, *The Relaxation Response*, reports that when people engage in breathing exercises on a regular basis, they feel more relaxed and notice beneficial effects in their bodies.

A simple but effective method of relaxation is the practice of deep breathing. Next time one of your students is distressed—frightened or crying, for instance—notice the student's breathing. Chances are it will be shallow and rapid, and will seem to emanate from the chest. This is called *thoratic breathing*, and is related to the tension in the student's body. The use of *diaphragmatic breathing*—deep breathing that emanates from the diaphragm—will tend to relax the student.

The diaphragm is a muscle that separates the chest from the abdomen. When we breathe, the diaphragm expands and contracts. This action, though usually automatic, is subject to voluntary control. When air is inhaled, the diaphragm expands and tenses; when it is exhaled, the

diaphragm relaxes. By lengthening the time we spend exhaling, we encourage full use of our lung capacity.

Blood is bright red when it leaves the lungs and has a high oxygen content. The heart pumps the blood through the arteries into the capillaries, reaching all parts of the body. The oxygen is exchanged for waste products in the cells, which dulls the color of the blood. The blood is returned to the right side of the heart and pumped into the lungs again. When the oxygen contacts the waste-laden blood, a type of combustion occurs as the blood cells take oxygen and release carbon dioxide. Following oxygenation, the blood returns to the left side of the heart and cycles again through the body.

If insufficient fresh air reaches the lungs, the blood is not properly purified. The body systems are slowly poisoned as waste products that should be removed continue to circulate. Blood lacking in oxygen is bluish and dark in color and results in poor complexion. Digestion is also hampered, and undernourished organs and tissues deteriorate. Anxiety, depression, and fatigue can be generated by poorly oxygenated blood. All this makes stressful situations more difficult to cope with.

To practice diaphragmatic breathing, have the students expand their abdomen so their stomach rises and falls with each breath while their chest size remains relatively constant. This action, which will probably feel forced and unnatural at first, provides sufficient oxygen to properly oxygenate the blood and maintain good mental and physical health.

Visualization

A French pharmacist, Emil Coue, believed that people are what they think. He asserted that if we simply imagine ourselves in a beautiful and natural scene, we can relax, relieve tension, solve problems, and change our mood from sad to happy.

Similarly, your students can use their imaginations to reduce stress. The possibility has its roots in the familiar "halo effect." If students *think* they will be miserable doing something, they probably will be. By the same token, if they believe they are capable, they are apt to produce acceptable results. Focusing the mind on positive healing images improves health and reduces anxiety. Using affirmations—positive statements, such as "I am relaxed"—bridges the conscious and unconscious minds, assisting the unconscious to bring a goal to realization.

Visualization is much like daydreaming. As the students recall memories or engage in self-talk, they can train themselves to consciously

develop their body's ability to ignore stress and induce relaxation.

When students get upset at school or in their personal lives, like the rest of us they tend to struggle with unwanted thoughts and rehash problems without resolution. Helping students relax their minds will allow them to relax their bodies—they cannot be relaxed and tense at the same time. Their minds cannot race wildly when they are focused on peaceful, calming thoughts. When students focus on positive images and thoughts, they block out intruding and upsetting ideas and can enjoy a deep state of physical relaxation.

Visualization is simple. Begin by having your students visualize a pleasant scene they have previously experienced. Encourage them to re-experience the scene, seeing, smelling, touching, hearing, and tasting every possible detail. By involving the five senses, students make the scene more powerful. If possible, play relaxing music or environmental sounds, such as those of the ocean or rainfall, to help produce a state of calm. Add deep breathing to multiply the benefits.

Once students have learned to control their thoughts and have trained themselves to respond to particular images, they can call forth those thoughts and images whenever they want to relax.

The goal in imagery training is to reduce and control mental anxiety. Being anxious is a cultivated habit, but with some conscious effort students can also cultivate the relaxation habit.

Meditation

Mention meditation to older students and they are likely to respond that it sounds difficult, boring, or weird. In reality, meditation is a simple mental exercise that gives students control over their capacity to attend to things in their environment. Students *choose* what to focus on rather than being subjected to the universe of stimuli.

Meditation *decreases* oxygen consumption, heart rate, alpha brain-wave emissions, blood lactate, and carbon monoxide production. It *increases* skin resistance and peripheral blood flow to the arms and legs. Meditation offers greater benefits in the form of specific physiological changes than do the most common relaxation techniques—reading, sleeping, and watching television. In numerous studies, the psychological health of regular meditators fared better than non-meditators. Those who meditated were less anxious, experienced greater self-actualization, more positive feelings following a stressful encounter, and were generally in a better state of mental health.

Meditation usually involves one of two focal points: auditory or visual. Using the former, students close their eyes and focus on a simple word or phrase which they silently repeat. For example, a student might think "one" as she breathes in and "two" as she breathes out. This quiets the mind and, although it may look as though students are doing nothing, the process is an active one. If thoughts and worries enter the mind, the student simply observes the thoughts, lets them go, and again concentrates on the breathing in and out.

The visual focus involves having students fix their attention on something unchanging, such as the flame of a candle or a spot on the wall as they experience mental silence. If both auditory and visual are used together, students add the repetition of the word or phrase (e.g., "one," "two") as they inhale and exhale.

Little is required to practice meditation—a quiet place, straight-backed chairs, and twenty minutes of uninterrupted time. To be effective in alleviating anxiety, improving sleep, or improving mental health, meditation should be practiced regularly.

Relax With Music

Why

Children respond readily to the rhythms of music. To soothe and relax them, play selections of classical and new-age music. If stress reduction is what you want, avoid rock beats, which tend to generate stress and evoke in the body a state of alarm. Harmonious music assists in bringing physically-, mentally-, and emotionally-charged bodies into a relaxed state.

When

Play music in the background as you lead guided imagery, visualization, and deep breathing exercises. Play music when you want to create a pleasant atmosphere conducive to relaxation, or when you want students to make a conscious effort to "de-stress." Use musical selections to ease the tension of test anxiety, to induce concentration during study periods, and to facilitate student interaction during cooperative learning sessions.

How

Recommended titles include Pachelbel's "Canon in D Major," Mike Rowland's "The Fairy Ring," and selections by new-age artists such as Steven Halpern, Zamfir, George Winston, or Georgia Kelly.

Relaxation Breathing

Why

Deep breathing is relaxing. It eases tensions, anxiety, depression, irritability, muscular tension, and fatigue. Deep breathing is also healthful, helping to oxygenate the blood and improving feelings of general well being. In addition, shallow breathing, hyperventilation, cold hands and feet, and breath-holding can be prevented and treated with deep-breathing exercises.

When

For maximum results, have students practice breathing exercises twice daily for approximately five to ten minutes each session. Although breathing exercises are not difficult to learn, time and patience are required to realize maximum health benefits. Some effects may not be observed for several months. In addition, encourage students to engage in a brief session of deep breathing during any tense or anxious moment, such as prior to speaking in front of a group, taking an exam, or dealing with a difficult situation.

How

1. Use the breathing exercises on the next three activity sheets.
2. Have students sit, stand, or lie in a quiet place. Sitting and standing posture should be erect but relaxed—not rigid.
3. Before you begin an activity, have students pay close attention to *how* they are breathing.
4. Don't be too concerned if students have trouble attending to their breathing. Suggest that, when their minds wander and they start thinking of homework, chores, television, or friends, they simply let those thoughts pass naturally and then return their attention to their breathing and the activity. Assure students that maintaining attention and focus will become easier and easier, and that they will soon learn to control drifting thoughts.
5. After you have led an activity at least once in class, distribute the corresponding activity sheet so that students may repeat the activity at home.

Activity Sheet

Natural Breathing

1. Sit up straight in a comfortable chair, or stand erect, but relaxed.

2. Notice how you are breathing. Breathe slowly and deeply.

3. Close your eyes and breathe slowly through your nose. Inhale deeply so that the air fills the lower section of your lungs and your diaphragm pushes your stomach outward to make room for the air. Then, as your lower ribs and chest expand, fill the middle part of your lungs. Finally, as your chest rises slightly, fill the upper part of the lungs. Do this in one continuous motion as you inhale.

4. Hold the breath for a few seconds.

5. Exhale slowly through your nose and mouth. As you exhale, allow all of the tensions to leave your body.

6. Continue to breathe deeply like this for five minutes (or more).

7. Gently open your eyes. Stay seated (or standing) in the same position for a few moments.

8. Resume your normal schedule feeling more relaxed than before.

Activity Sheet

The Windmill Breathing Exercise

1. Stand straight with your arms extended in front of you.

2. Inhale deeply so that the air fills the lower section of your lungs and your diaphragm pushes your stomach outward to make room for the air. Then, as your lower ribs and chest expand, fill the middle part of your lungs. Finally, as your chest rises slightly, fill the upper part of the lungs. Do this in one continuous motion as you inhale.

3. Rotate your arms backward in a circle several times.

4. Reverse direction and rotate your arms forward, or alternate directions like a windmill.

5. Exhale forcefully through your mouth.

6. Breathe several deep, purifying breaths.

Activity Sheet

Breathing for Kids

Play relaxing music at a low volume (optional) while you read these directions to your students:

Sit or lie in a comfortable position. Gently close your eyes and slowly breath in and out. Take a deep breath and let it out. (Pause.) Take another deep breath and let it go. (Pause.) Continue to breath deeply. Imagine a warm summer day. (Pause.) You are outside, lying on your back in lush green grass. You are looking at the sky, which is a beautiful blue. (Pause.) You see soft white fluffy clouds that look like large tufts of cotton. Point to one of the biggest clouds and, as you slowly pull your hand back, watch the cloud begin to drift toward you. (Pause.) See it float down close to the ground. Climb onto the cloud. Feel how soft and comfortable it is. As you breathe, feel the softness of the cloud and watch the cloud become pink. (Pause.) Take a deep breath and fill your lungs with the lovely pink of the cloud. (Pause.) Notice how you are feeling. (Pause.) Breathe in and out slowly. (Pause.) Now think of your favorite color and notice that your cloud has become that color. (Pause.) Take a deep breath and breathe in your favorite color. (Pause.) Notice how you are feeling now. (Pause.) Breathe in and out slowly. (pause) Change the color again and notice how that color feels. (Pause.) Change the color one more time. (Pause.) Always notice how you feel. (Pause.) Now as you breathe out, watch all the colors flow out like a rainbow. Enjoy lying in your rainbow cloud. (Pause.) Say to yourself, "I am relaxed." "I feel good." "I am healthy." "The colors are pretty and relaxing." (Pause.) Take another deep breath and blow the beautiful rainbow cloud away. Watch your special cloud drift up and away. (Pause.) When you are ready, open your eyes and look around. Gently stretch and notice how relaxed and good you feel.

Progressive Relaxation

Why

Even young people may have chronically tense muscles. By tensing and relaxing muscle groups, one group at a time, they can identify specific muscles and recognize the difference between tension and relaxation. Deep muscle relaxation reduces physiological tension, and is incompatible with anxiety. In addition, progressive relaxation can help relieve insomnia, fatigue, depression, and high blood pressure.

When

Use progressive relaxation activities to help students obtain immediate relief from general muscular tension. To treat chronic symptoms (or to help students habituate the process), two 15-minute sessions each day produce excellent results in one to two weeks.

How

Lead the students in the progressive relaxation exercise at least twice before distributing the "Progressive Relaxation" activity sheet for their personal use.

Have your students either lie down or sit in a chair. In a pleasant voice, read aloud the directions on the sheet.

As students systematically tense and relax each muscle group, suggest that they use self-talk to assist in melting the tension. Messages like "Relax, let all the tension dissolve," or "I am feeling calm and relaxed."

Activity Sheet

Progressive Relaxation

1. Sit straight in a comfortable chair and relax. Place your hands in your lap and your feet on the floor. Close your eyes.

2. Tense, tighten, or squeeze the muscles in your right hand into a fist and hold tightly for 5 seconds. Release, noticing the tension in your fist, hand and forearm. Relax for 20 to 30 seconds. Repeat with your right hand, noticing the contrast between feelings of tension and relaxation. Repeat with your left hand and then make fists with both hands at the same time. (Remember to tighten for 5 seconds and release for 20 to 30 seconds each time.)

3. Bend your elbows and tense your biceps. Relax, straighten your arms feeling the difference between the tension and relaxation.

4. Wrinkle your forehead tightly. Smooth it out and relax. Frown and feel the strain throughout your forehead. Relax and let your forehead become smooth again.

5. Tightly squeeze your eyes closed. Relax. Keep them closed gently.

6. Clench your jaw, bite hard. Relax.

7. Press your head back as far as possible and notice the tension in your neck. Roll your head to the right and then to the left. Straighten your head and bring it forward.

(Continued on Next Page)

8. Place your chin on your chest. Feel the tension in your throat. Relax. Bring your head to a comfortable position again. Lift your shoulders high in a shrug. Hold. Relax.

9. Breathe in and take a complete natural breath. Hold and notice the tension. Exhale. Repeat several times. Tighten your stomach and hold. Relax. Place your hand on your stomach. Breathe deeply, pushing your hand up. Hold and relax. Arch your back, being careful not to strain it. Relax the rest of your body.

10. Tighten your buttocks and thighs. Flex your thighs by pressing down with your heels as hard as you can. Relax. Curl your toes downward, making your calves tense. Relax. Bend your toes upward, feeling the tension in your shins. Relax.

11. Feel the heaviness in your lower body. Relax your feet, ankles, calves, shins, knees, thighs, and buttocks.

12. Relax shoulders, arms, hands, neck, jaw, and facial muscles.

Recording Personal Relaxation Tapes

Why

Even though there are a number of relaxation tapes on the market, your students can benefit from making a personal relaxation tape. By making their own tape, students can appeal to their personal taste, supply their own messages, voice, and sequence of relaxation, and concentrate on areas where they hold the most tension.

When

Give students the opportunity to make a personal tape as soon as they are reasonably familiar with the process of progressive relaxation. Suggest that they use their personal tape at home, in the early morning and early evening.

How

1. Obtain a 30-minute tape for each student, or ask the students to supply their own.

2. Have interested students prepare a 10-minute script, focusing on the muscle groups where they tend to hold tension. Check the scripts and make suggestions.

3. Allow students who don't want to hear their own voice to work with a partner. Direct the partners to take turns recording each other's script.

4. Remind the students to include a pause after each instruction—5 seconds for tensing and 20 to 30 seconds for relaxing.

5. Have the students select relaxing music such as Rowland's "The Fairy Ring" to accompany their words. Suggest that they include two or three positive affirmations in their script.

6. Secure a vacant room or storage area where the students can go to make their recordings. Set up a schedule for use of the room.

Visualization

Why

Visualization, or the use of positive imagery, is one of the most invaluable skills a student can learn. Not only can visualizations be used to manage stress, they can be consciously created to achieve a goal. The desired process and outcome, whether it be making an oral report, playing the violin, initiating a conversation, improving a back swing, or skiing a difficult slope, is repeatedly visualized exactly as it would look if it were occurring perfectly.

When

Students already visualize daily. Once they learn to visualize *deliberately*, they may find that the easiest times to employ the process occur while lying in bed—in the morning before rising and at night before falling sleeping. Other opportunities for visualizing emerge throughout the day, in the moments prior to a test or conference, while waiting for an appointment, or while doing warm-up stretches before an athletic contest.

How

Have your students sit or lie comfortably with their eyes gently closed. Ask the students to scan their bodies to notice tension in specific muscles and relax those muscles as much as possible.

Play a tape of soft, relaxing music in the background while you read aloud the script printed on the activity sheet entitled, "Visualization: Creating a Special Relaxation Place."

Activity Sheet

Visualization: Creating a Special Relaxation Place

In a quiet, soothing voice, read these directions to the students:

You are going to create a special place where only you can go. It will be a retreat, with a private entry. It will be safe, comfortable, peaceful, and filled with sensuous detail. For example, you may choose to create your retreat in a wooded area patterned with sunshine and shade, where you can hear birds sing, smell flowers, look at trees, touch rocks and plants, and feel the breeze..

Close your eyes and in your imagination, walk slowly to a quiet place. (Pause.) Your special place can be indoors or outdoors. (Pause.) This place is peaceful and safe. (Pause.) What things do you see on your way to your special place? (Pause.) What sounds do you hear? (Pause.) What can you smell? (Pause.) Notice the temperature. Is it cold, hot, or in between? Make the temperature comfortable. (Pause.) Notice the path to your special place. Only you see it and know it is there. This is a safe, special, private spot. (Pause.) Feel the ground beneath your feet. (Pause.) Follow the path until you enter your safe place. (Pause.) You have arrived at your special place. (Pause.) What is above your head? (Pause.) What is below your feet? (Pause.) Reach out and touch something. What does it feel like? (Pause.) What do you hear? (Pause.) What do you smell? (Pause.) Remember that in this special place, nothing can harm you. There is no danger. You can let go of all tension. You are relaxed. You are safe. You are comfortable. Picture relaxation gently washing over you like a wave. (Pause.) Affirm, "I am relaxed." "I release all tension." (Pause.) Memorize the way this place smells, looks, and sounds. (Pause.) You can come back to this place any time. You can relax here whenever you wish. You can come to this special place to solve a problem. Now, leave your special place by the same path. (Pause.) Notice the things along the path. (Pause.) Look ahead and appreciate the view. (Pause.) Remember, you can return to this special place whenever you wish. When you are ready, open your eyes and take a few moments to enjoy the relaxation in your mind and body.

Meditation

Why

Meditation will help your students relax, become centered, improve their concentration, and learn to live more fully in the present moment. Meditation can also be used to curtail obsessive thinking, anxiety, depression, and hostility.

When

After leading the meditation exercises in the classroom, suggest that students use them any time they can be quietly alone for several minutes at home. Early in the morning and just before dinner are good times.

How

1. Lead your students in both the "Mantra Meditation" and the "Breath-Counting Meditation."

2. Have the students find a comfortable position: in a chair with knees comfortably apart and hands resting in their lap, cross-legged on the floor, or Japanese fashion on their knees with big toes touching, heels pointed outward, and buttocks resting on the soles of their feet.

3. Remind the students to keep their back straight, mouth closed, and to breathe through their nose.

4. Direct the students to take several deep breaths with their eyes closed. Urge them to maintain a passive attitude. They will have many thoughts interrupt their concentration; tell them to simply notice the thoughts and let them go.

5. In a quietly audible voice, read the directions for the activity of your choice.

6. After the activity, invite the students to discuss their experience.

7. If your students are grade 5 or above, distribute the activity sheet so that they may repeat the activity at home.

Activity Sheet

Mantra Meditation

Mantra is the most common form of meditation throughout the world. Select a word or syllable you like, such as "love," "one," or "OM."

Sit comfortably and focus your attention. Begin by taking several deep breaths. Chant your mantra silently to yourself by saying the word or syllable again and again in your mind. As you repeat your word, thoughts may occasionally intrude. Let them pass and focus again on repeating your special word. Eventually, as you say it over and over, your mantra will find its own rhythm.

Try to stay focused on the mantra so that it does not become automatic or mechanical. Maintain awareness of the process.

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Activity Sheet

Breath-Counting Meditation

This is the most relaxing of the meditations.

Sit in a comfortable position and take several deep breaths to center yourself. Close your eyes or fix them on a spot about four feet in front of you. (If you like, use a lighted candle and focus on the flicker of the flame.)

Take deep breaths and focus your attention on each part of the breath: inhale, exhale, pause. As you exhale, say "one" and continue counting each exhale, saying "two...three...four." Begin again with "one." Should you happen to lose count, simply start over again with "one".

If you slip into thinking about other things, don't try to force the thought from your mind. Let the thought pass and release it. Then return to counting your breaths.

After 20 minutes, bring your focus back to the room and take a few moments to get reoriented. Stretch and yawn.

Self-Talk

The Words of Winners

It doesn't matter what situation we encounter, our response to stress comes from within. Self-talk (the words we say to ourselves) serves as an interface between our behavior and our belief system. Self-talk helps us assess the opportunities and threats posed by our environment and prepare to deal with them. Often, just the *anticipation* of a stressful event can trigger anxiety. Sometimes the event itself never occurs.

During most of their waking moments, students are engaged in some form of self-talk. This "talk" takes the form of self-urging and of observer commentary—occasionally congratulatory, sometimes neutral, and often critical. Self-talk sounds very much like a conversation, except that one person has all the lines. It is largely through these thoughts that students interpret their external world. When their self-talk is rational and realistic, they function well. However, when their self-talk is irrational and unrealistic, they experience stress and perhaps some degree of emotional disturbance.

On occasion all students have expectations of failure. Their belief that the worst will happen creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. Since the way a student sees the world reflects his or her state of mind, it is important to help students avoid negative expectations, attitudes, and thoughts that unnecessarily generate more stress and undermine self-esteem.

Irrational Beliefs Cause Stress

Psychologist and coauthor of Rational Emotive Therapy: A Guide to Rational Living, Albert Ellis, explains the relationship between events and feelings. He says that the feelings and emotions we experience are *not* caused by the events that precede them. Events are simply events. The sequence goes something like this: An event occurs, we engage in self-talk about the event, our self-talk activates our *belief system*, and we experience the emotional consequence of our belief about the event.

Suppose you administer an important test to your students on Friday. Monday morning, instead of returning the graded exams, you announce that you believe some cheating took place, so everyone will have to retake the test. The *event* is retaking the test. Some students believe you, others think you are kidding. A few students feel guilty; others are frightened; still others, pleased. Some students don't care one way or the other.

The event is the same for all the students but the reactions vary. The student who believes she failed the first exam and can pass a retake feels relieved. The student who did well on the exam and fears he may do worse on the retake reacts with dismay, then anger. A couple of students express satisfaction when they realize that those who cheated aren't going to get away with it. Some students are neutral about the retake because they believe they can do just as well the second time as the first. Others are skeptical about the whole thing, believing that you probably are not serious about giving the retest.

Clearly the event by itself did not cause the feelings experienced by the students; if it had, everyone would have reacted similarly. Each student's *belief* about the event caused his or her emotional reaction.

If beliefs cause feelings, then to change negative, stressful, or self-defeating feelings students have to change the beliefs from which those feelings spring. They have to learn to examine and question their beliefs. For example, when a student's self-talk consists of absolutes, such as "should," "must," "have to," "ought to," "always," and "never," the student is probably applying standards that are irrational. "I should always please my parents (even if I can't)," "I have to do everything perfectly (even when I lack the skills)," and "I never lose my temper (even when something makes me angry)" are examples of beliefs based on absolute standards. Students who consciously or unconsciously ascribe to such standards are devastated when they (for example) fail to please their parents, perform less than perfectly, or express anger. They think that these behaviors make them "bad," when in reality it is their *standards* that are bad.

Examining self-labeling statements can give students clues to their irrational beliefs. With statements such as "I'm stupid," "I'm ugly," "I'm incapable" and so on, students alter what they see and hear around them to match their belief system. That belief sytem not only affects how they feel inside at the moment, it determines what they remember when they reflect on an experience later.

Focus to Win

Appropriate, positive self-talk can help students prepare for stressful situations and overcome anxiety when those situations occur. Students who learn to substitute positive for negative self-talk can largely subdue the negative beliefs that lead to feelings of fear, anger, shame, or frustration. Focusing on the negative, students cripple themselves; focusing on the positive they support themselves. Clearly it is better to create self-fulfilling prophecies that revolve around success than around failure.

Denis Waitley, author of The Psychology of Winning, says we are motivated by our current dominant thought and move in the direction of what we are thinking of most. In other words, if students focus on the achievement they seek, rather than related fears, they will move in the direction of achievement. Positive self-talk will motivate them to solutions and goal attainment, not failure. Waitley uses a powerful example to underscore this point. He suggests that if a 16-foot plank is laid on the floor with a ten-dollar bill at the end, we will focus on the money, walk the plank, and pick up the ten dollars. However, if the plank is placed between two 20-story buildings with one-hundred dollar bill at the end, the game is completely changed. Our current dominant thought becomes fear of falling rather than the money. This change in focus affects our behavior.

Similarly, if Charlene fears an important exam coming up, she can move in one of two directions. She can cave in emotionally to her fear, engaging in self-talk such as, "I always freeze under pressure," or "I can't think when someone is testing me," or "The teacher doesn't like me and is looking for reasons to give me a poor grade." Or, she can tell herself, "I always make my best effort," "I handle pressure well," or "I have an excellent opportunity to show the teacher what a good student I really am."

With positive self-talk, Charlene improves her performance and decreases her anxiety. Her goal is to cope with anxious feelings so she can concentrate on what she is doing with a relaxed mind and body. Charlene can manage this stressful situation by preparing for it, coping with negative feelings as they start to build. Instead of becoming overwhelmed by a seemingly unbearable situation, Charlene can transform the threat into a challenge.

By recognizing that many of the situations she encounters will be stressful, Charlene can *prepare* for the challenge by engaging in a series of positive behaviors. She can start by replacing her negative thinking with positive thinking. Then, she can study the unit or lesson covered in the exam until she is completely comfortable with the material. Once familiar with the material, Charlene is free to focus on the task at hand rather than on her fear of it. She can remind herself that this situation may be difficult but that she knows several effective ways of dealing with it. She can take a few deep, cleansing breaths and say to herself, "I know this material well and I have worked hard preparing for it. I'll think about what I need to do. I can do this; I'm not worried."

As exam time approaches, even though Charlene has made appropriate preparations, she will still have to cope with building anxiety. She can tell

herself, "I can definitely meet this challenge. I am a good student. Relax. Time to slow down and focus. I'm in control." During the test, anxiety may run high. Charlene may sweat, shiver, even feel dizzy. She can say, "I'm okay. I'm doing well. I can handle this. I won't try to eliminate all my anxiety, I'll keep it where it is manageable."

After the exam, Charlene can review both the experience and her feelings. She can acknowledge the benefits of positive self-talk and reward herself for effectively managing a stressful event.

Winners in life find something positive in every situation. Students should neither let themselves nor others dilute or contradict their positive self-talk with negative, irrational judgements. If students practice positive self-talk, and emphasize their goals and achievements, they will be winners.

Self Talk

Why

Students are always talking to themselves *about themselves*, both in the company of others and when they are alone. Depending upon what they say, this silent "self-talk" either causes them to feel better about themselves, or worse. Before students can learn to control self-talk, they have to become aware of it. They must also learn to recognize the subtle but powerful influence self-talk has in shaping their feelings about themselves.

How

Distribute the "Self-Talk Assessment Sheet." Talk with the students for a few minutes about the concept of self-talk, and then ask them to complete the sheet. After about 5 minutes, have the students form groups of five to eight and discuss their reactions to the statements. Finally, conduct a follow-up class discussion, focusing on the value of students' making a diligent effort to block out negative self-talk, substituting positive statements as often as they can.

Assessment Sheet

Self-Talk

Read each statement on the list and imagine how you would feel if you said those words to yourself. Check the "better" column if you think the statement would help you feel better about yourself. Check the "worse" column if you think the statement would cause you to feel worse about yourself.

	better	worse
1. I have the biggest nose in school.	_____	_____
2. I may not always win, but I have a winning attitude.	_____	_____
3. I have some good friends.	_____	_____
4. I'm just such an idiot.	_____	_____
5. People depend on me to do a good job.	_____	_____
6. It's not my fault.	_____	_____
7. But I always do it this way.	_____	_____
8. I did this okay last time.	_____	_____
9. I can deal with this.	_____	_____
10. It's okay if I am nervous.	_____	_____
11. I'm short, but I can really run fast.	_____	_____
12. It's only one mistake.	_____	_____
13. I'm sure I can fix this.	_____	_____
14. I wish I were like my friend. She always does everything just right.	_____	_____
15. I never do anything right.	_____	_____
16. My hair looks awful.	_____	_____

Self-Talk Visualization

Why

By mentally and emotionally recreating a successful experience, your students can examine the positive things they said to themselves and recognize the crucial role self-talk played in determining the outcome of the situation. This will help students understand the importance of generating positive self-talk in other situations.

How

Read the script while playing relaxing music in the background. Have the students sit comfortably with their eyes closed . Pause long enough after each suggestion to allow students time to recreate the successful experience in their mind.

Relax, and breathe slowly and deeply. (Pause.) Take several deep breaths. (Pause.) Uncross your arms and legs. Take another deep breath and let all the tension of the day just float away. (Pause.) Recall a time when you had a successful learning experience—a time when you learned something fairly easily and you learned it well. (Pause.) This learning experience may have occurred a long time ago or it may have happened recently. You may have been alone or in the company of others. (Pause.) What you learned was important to you and you were glad that you learned it. (Pause.) See yourself in that situation now. What do you see? (Pause.) What do you feel? (Pause.) What do you hear? (Pause.) What words do you say to yourself? (Pause.) Are you happy about the result? (Pause.) Does the experience offer joy, wonder, delight? (Pause.) Does it make you laugh? (Pause.) Do you tell yourself, "good job?" (Pause.) Do others say positive things to you? What are some of the things you or others are saying? (Pause.) Take time to fully re-experience and enjoy that moment again. Smile and feel good about what you learned and what was said. (Pause.) You can recall this moment and feeling any time you wish. Become aware of your breathing again. (Pause.) Breathe deeply. When you are ready to come back to the present, open your eyes and look around the room, alert and happy with your experience.

In a follow-up discussion, ask students to describe what they experienced, and reinforce the benefits of positive self-talk.

Affirmations

Why

By deliberately affirming that they do certain things well, your students can reinforce their strengths and positive attributes. Knowing that students are inclined to focus on their weaknesses, you can go a step further and show students how to construct positive affirmations around skills, abilities, and qualities they would like to cultivate or improve.

How

Distribute the "Affirmations" activity sheet and go over the directions. On the chalkboard write these guidelines for constructing an affirmation:

- Write the affirmation in the present tense. Say "I am..." rather than "I will... ."
- Be specific. For example, if gymnastics is your focus, specify in which area of gymnastics you are improving, such as parallel bars, rings, freestyle, etc.
- Repeat each affirmation often. Picture yourself exhibiting the attribute or performing the skill perfectly.

Have the students get together in dyads or triads and practice delivering their affirmations aloud and with conviction. Urge the students to coach and encourage each other.

Activity Sheet

Affirmations

List ten things that you do well. Include anything that you feel good about, small or large, such as reading, dancing, pitching a fast ball, running, programming a computer, being a friend.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Choose three items from your list, and write an affirmation for each one. For example, "I enjoy reading," "I'm a terrific dancer," or "I am a good friend."

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

(Continued on Next Page)

Now list five things you would like to do *better.* For example, you might wish to improve your ability in math, public speaking, making new friends, or playing a musical instrument.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Choose two items from your list and write an affirmation for each one. Write the affirmation as if you *already had* the skill or ability. For example, "Math comes easily to me," "I am poised and confident when speaking to a group," or "I make a new friend every week."

1. _____
2. _____

Affirmations Visualization

Why

Visualization helps reinforce positive self-talk. By picturing a situation or achievement actually happening, students can more powerfully influence their brain to accept and manifest the desired change.

How

Have the students picture themselves in a comfortable scene while you read the following directions aloud. Include in your visualization any additional statements that you judge appropriate and relevant.

Sit in a comfortable position and relax. (Pause.) Close your eyes and take a deep breath. (Pause.) Let yourself relax completely. (Pause.) Listen to your breathing. (Pause.) Take a deep breath, hold it, and let it out. (Pause.) Repeat these special messages silently to yourself: "I am relaxed and comfortable." (Pause.) "I feel happy and peaceful." (Pause.) "I am a good friend and I make friends easily." (Pause.) "I am an able learner." (Pause.) "I remember all that I learn." (Pause.) "Learning comes easily for me." (Pause.) "I am healthy and strong." (Pause.) "I feel relaxed." (Pause.) "I take good care of myself." (Pause.) "I am a special person to my family." (Pause.) Think of another message that is important to you. Say it silently to yourself. (Pause.) Think of another message. Say that one, too. (Pause.) Accept that these messages are absolutely true. (Pause.) Take a deep breath and let it all out slowly. (Pause.) Take another breath. (Pause.) When you feel comfortable and ready, open your eyes and stretch your body gently.

Have to...Choose to...

Why

Often students express the belief that they have little choice concerning their day-to-day activities. They point to the expectations of parents, teachers, and "the system" as justification for this belief. Some students feel victimized and powerless. This activity gives students an opportunity to acknowledge the fact that they do have choices, and to understand how negative self-talk undermines their power and control.

How

Use the "Have to... Choose to..." activity sheet for this exercise. Ask the students to create a list of things they feel they *have* to do, such as homework, chores, going to school, etc.

Have the students pair up and read their list to a partner.

Next, tell the students to draw a line through the word "have" in each statement and write the word "choose" in its place. Instruct the students to read the list to their partner again.

Expect disagreements concerning what the students *have* to do and what they *choose* to do. Ask what consequences they would face if they didn't do some of the things they listed. Point out that they choose to do many things in order to avoid those consequences. When the students recognize that at some level they are indeed choosing their actions, they will experience a greater sense of control in their lives.

In the spaces at the bottom of the activity sheet, have the students write in some positive self-talk statements describing their freedom of choice. For example, "I freely choose every action I take," or "No one forces me to do anything. I am responsible for my choices."

Activity Sheet

Have to...Choose to

Make a list of things you think you *have* to do. Be as specific as possible.

Examples: I have to do my math homework.
I have to take out the trash at home.
I have to arrive at school before 8:00 a.m..

1. I have to _____
2. I have to _____
3. I have to _____
4. I have to _____
5. I have to _____
6. I have to _____
7. I have to _____
8. I have to _____
9. I have to _____
10. I have to _____

Positive self-talk statements:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Happiness Is...

Why

By looking at what makes them feel happy and sad, and by examining the kinds of self-talk they use in response to happy and sad events, students can develop a greater sense of agency in their emotional lives.

How

Give each student a "Happiness is..." activity sheet. Review the sheet, discussing how the students might respond to each item and offering examples. Then give the students a few minutes to complete the sheet.

In a follow-up discussion, clarify the cause and effect relationship between what a person says to himself or herself about a situation and how the person ultimately *feels* about the situation. Point out how rare it is to have mostly negative thoughts about an experience and still end up feeling good about it—or to have primarily positive thoughts about an event and end up feeling bad about it.

Reinforce the concept that individuals have control over their thoughts, their responses, and their feelings.

Activity Sheet

Happiness Is...

List two things that almost always cause you to feel happy:

1. _____

2. _____

Write down the statements you make to yourself about these things (your self-talk):

List 2 things that cause you to feel sad:

1. _____

2. _____

What do you say to yourself in these situations?

_____

_____

_____

Which statements make you feel better? Which ones make you feel worse?

_____

_____

_____

Rewrite the statements that make you feel worse. Change them to statements that bring you happiness.

_____

_____

_____

Self-Talk Game

Why

A game is a useful way to reinforce the importance of positive self-talk and the impact self-talk has in influencing our feelings and performance.

How

1. Think of a number of situations that commonly cause students to indulge in self-talk (both positive and negative). Write the situations on index cards. (Use the situations listed below, add different situations based on your own observations, and ask the students to contribute others.)

2. Place the cards in a pile, face down.

3. Have a volunteer draw a card and read aloud the situation written on the card. Ask what the volunteer might say to himself or herself in that situation. For example, upon realizing that an important homework assignment has been left at home, a student might say, "I would forget my head if it weren't attached."

4. Ask the class to decide if the statement represents negative or positive self-talk. You might call for a hand signal, such as "thumbs up" if the statement is positive or "thumbs down" if the statement is negative. If the statement is negative, give the student an opportunity to restate the response in positive terms. If the student has difficulty, ask the class to assist. For example, the student could say, "It's unfortunate that I forgot my homework, but I am getting better and better at remembering my homework and other things. I have a good memory."

5. Continue until all of the cards have been drawn. Involve as many students as possible.

(Continued on Next Page)

6. Conduct a brief class discussion at the conclusion of the game. Ask the students what they find easiest and hardest about controlling self-talk.

Possible situations:

— You forget to bring your homework to school.
— You get 4 out of 10 wrong on a spelling test.
— You get 9 out of 10 right on a quiz.
— You miss the school bus.
— You are left out of a game on the playground.
— You strike out in a softball game.
— You move to a new neighborhood.
— Your best friend goes shopping with someone else.
— You arrive late to class.
— You get an A on an assignment.
— A group project goes well.
— Your new haircut didn't turn out like you wanted it to.
— You spill your milk at lunch.
— You have a library book that is six weeks overdue.
— You run for student council and lose.
— You run for student council and win.
— Someone points out that you have a stain on your shirt.
— You have to complete a lengthy report on the civil war.
— You get a B- on your book report.
— You are asked to baby-sit.

Feel-Good Journal

Why

Writing about their positive experiences on a day-to-day basis can help students break the habit of focusing on problems, worries, embarrassments, and negative encounters. Journal-writing also encourages students to recognize and give themselves credit for some of the many responsible, helpful, and creative things they do each day.

How

Have your students decorate a special notebook and title it, "Things I Feel Good About." Direct the students to keep the journal with them and make daily entries reflecting their positive experiences. For example, a student might write:

"My friend walked to school with me."
"Mom baked my favorite cookies."
"I helped my younger sister with her homework."
"My teacher smiled at me and said, 'good job.'"

Give students an opportunity to review their journal often, either with a partner or a small group. Encourage them to refer to their journal as a way of lifting their spirits when they are feeling down.

Assertiveness

Expect and Get a Fair Deal

Students today experience many demands in their lives, among them the expectations of parents and teachers, burgeoning lifestyle and career choices, pressure from peers, and unremitting media seduction. If students are willing *and able* to speak out and to say no, they can take control of their lives, make good decisions, and respond honestly and flexibly to their environment. However, if they fail to say no and to set limits, and are unable to refuse the requests and resist the demands of others, they will feel over-stressed, resentful, and unhappy. They may even stockpile their anger, creating a potentially crippling *internal* source of stress. In today's world, it is crucial that we teach students to be assertive.

Assertive people are not without stress—no one is. But they have acquired the ability to let others know what they are feeling and thinking—without bullying or being bullied. They use assertive skills to handle the challenges and conflicts of daily life.

What Qualities Distinguish Assertive People?

In 1949, Andrew Salter first described assertiveness as a personality trait. Later, psychotherapists redefined assertiveness as the ability to communicate one's personal rights and feelings to others.

As important as it is for students to stand up for their rights, this is just one facet of assertiveness. Others include the ability to express likes and dislikes, say no, ask for clarification, accept compliments gracefully, and disagree with others openly, without being offensive.

It is the business of students to learn to accept responsibility for what they think, feel, want, and do. Although we sometimes find it hard to accept, *they* are the resident experts on themselves. If others blame, attack, or question them, they have the right to respond, to explain their position, and to negotiate differences. In all such interactions, students who have learned to be assertive will fare better than those who are essentially aggressive or passive.

Aggressive people get what they want without regard for the feelings of others. They attack, blame, intimidate, and threaten. The goal of the aggressive person is to dominate and win, forcing others to submit and

lose. Aggressive people are not often taken advantage of but neither are they desirable to be around. And since most have the same needs for love, respect, and companionship as the rest of humanity, aggressive people frequently end up alone, guilt-ridden, and bitter, *feeling* like losers in spite of their win-at-any-cost attitude.

Passive individuals are abdicators. They stay out of the driver's seat, prefering to let other people run their lives. By not expressing their feelings, thoughts, and desires, they give up the right to shape their environment. The passive person is apt to do what others expect regardless of personal beliefs. The goals of the passive person are to please others, circumvent conflict, and avoid rejection. And while passive people seldom open themselves to direct censure, they are almost universally ignored, and are frequently victimized. In addition, passive people are very apt to stockpile feelings of resentment, expressing them in ambiguous and sometimes destructive ways.

Assertive people stand up for their rights, and express their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in direct, honest, and helpful ways, without violating the rights of others. They are considerate of the feelings of others. The goals of assertive people are to communicate effectively, to get what they want, and to give and receive respect. Assertive people frequently enjoy high self-esteem.

Teaching Assertive Skills

If we want students to be as effective as possible, we need to show them how to sort out what it is they want, and then express themselves clearly. Students are more likely to be heard when they neither blame others nor imply that their needs alone are important.

In assertively confronting a situation or person, students can be taught to be as objective as possible. We need to show them how to paint verbal pictures of situations including the roles played by the other people involved. Particularly effective are statements that begin, "When..." or "When you..." and describe circumstances and behaviors without ascribing feelings or motives; the formulation of "I-statements" in which the students take responsibility for their feelings and refrain from blaming others for their own disappointments or frustrations; and efforts to find solutions rather than make contests out of who is "right" and who is "wrong."

When students are assertive, they value themselves and respect the rights of others. They are more successful in their communication and they earn the respect of others—even when disagreeing with them.

Assertiveness Skills

Why

Often students lack the skills necessary to communicate their needs, feelings, wants, and ideas responsibly. They handle situations aggressively or passively, but do not know how to respond assertively. By teaching assertive communication skills, you can help students become more effective at getting their needs met and more skillful at resisting peer pressure. And with sufficient practice, they can transfer the skills they learn in the classroom to situations outside of school.

When

To ensure skill integration, students need to practice assertiveness techniques at regular intervals over an extended period of time.

How

1. Discuss the three styles of communicating so it is clear to the students what the terms *aggressive*, *passive*, and *assertive* mean.
2. Using the activity sheet, "Aggressive, Passive, and Assertive Statements," review the three styles.
3. Ask the students to help you reword aggressive and passive statements (from the sheet) to make them assertive.
4. Taking an example from the role play sheet, ask a student to help you demonstrate how role playing works. Show how a person might respond to the example using each of the three styles—first aggressive, then passive, and finally assertive.
5. Choose pairs of students to role play the remaining situations in front of the class. Ask the rest of the students to help you coach and direct.
6. Discuss positive and negative consequences to asserting one's personal rights. Negative consequences might include losing or alienating a friend, being rejected, not getting what you want, and hurting someone's feelings. Positive consequences might include getting your needs met, gaining the respect of self and others, venting frustrations and angry feelings, being honest, reducing feelings of resentment, and increasing feelings of self-confidence and self-esteem.

Activity Sheet

Aggressive, Passive, and Assertive Statements

Read each statement and decide if it is aggressive (**AG**), passive (**P**) or assertive (**AS**). Place a √ in the column of your choice.

AG	P	AS	
			1. Knock it off, dummy!
			2. Could you maybe help me, if it's not too much bother?
			3. I need my permission slip signed today.
			4. You are such a jerk, don't let him have that!
			5. I'm upset that you don't want to go with me.
			6. Please clear your dishes from the table.
			7. Well, okay, I guess you could copy my home work.
			8. Pay attention and get moving.
			9. I want you to return the sweater you borrowed.
			10. I'd really like to go to the game on Friday night.

Role Play **Elementary**

Everyone has basic personal rights. Use these role plays to practice exercising your personal rights in appropriate ways.

1. Someone grabs the toy you are playing with in the classroom.
2. Your friend asks if he/she can copy your homework.
3. You want to eat lunch with two popular students.
4. Your younger brother or sister continually goes into your room and gets into your things.
5. A stranger offers you a ride home from school.

(Continued on Next Page)

Think of two more examples and write them here.

1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

Role Play **Secondary**

Everyone has basic personal rights. The following role play situations are designed to help you practice appropriate ways of exercising your personal rights.

1. A friend borrows two of your tapes and they get ruined.
2. A friend copies your book report without your knowing it and turns it in as his own. The teacher recognizes that both reports are the same and asks to talk to you.
3. You audition for a lead role in the school play and receive only a minor role.
4. Your parents say you may not go to the concert with your friends.
5. Your friend is supposed to pick you up for a surprise birthday party and arrives one hour late.
6. Someone you would like to date starts talking to you at a party and suggests, "Let's go outside. I have some pot we can smoke."

Write two more examples here:

1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

"I" Messages

Why

The term "I" messages refers to an extremely effective assertive-communication skill. An "I" message is a form of self-disclosure. It lets others know how you are feeling; in addition, it focuses on the *behavior* rather than *character* of the person with whom you are communicating. Teaching "I" messages helps students become more skillful communicators, and encourages them to be in touch with their feelings and responsible for their behavior.

How

1. Distribute the activity sheet, ""I" Messages" and go over it, clarifying the differences between an "I" message and a "you" message.
2. Dramatize the differences with several examples of your own.
3. Identify and discuss the various parts of an "I" message.
4. Distribute the activity sheet, "Changing 'You' Messages to 'I' Messages." Working in pairs, have the students complete the sheet.
5. Conduct a follow-up discussion.

Activity Sheet

"I" Messages

Read the sample "I" message and then write one of your own.

Situation: A student gets home very late from school. His/her parent says:

I get frightened when you are late
(feeling, emotion) (behavior, action)
because I think you may be hurt or have a problem.
(effect on me and/or others)
I want you to be on time or call me.
(behavior change desired)

Now, you try it!

Choose one of these situations:

____You loan your camera to a friend with a full role of film inside. The friend returns the camera empty.

____You catch your brother (or sister) going through your drawers.

____You agree to go bike riding with a friend, but the friend has a faster bike and keeps getting way ahead of you. You feel alone.

Or write your own situation: _____

_____

I feel _____
(State your feeling or emotion.)

when you _____,
(Describe the behavior of the other person.)

because _____.
(Describe the effect that behavior has on you and/or others.)

I want _____.
(Explain the behavior change you desire.)

Activity Sheet

Changing "You" Messages to "I" Messages

Situation: You are trying to explain something to a friend and another friend keeps interrupting.

"You" Message: *Would you be quiet and listen for a change!*

"I" Message: _____

_____

Situation: Your brother (or sister) won't let you watch your favorite T.V. show, even though it's your turn to choose.

"You" Message: *You're so selfish. You always watch what you want, even when it's not your turn. I'm going to tell Mom!*

"I" Message: _____

_____

(Continued on Next Page)

Situation: Your friend borrows your favorite sweater and brings it back with a big stain—right on the front.

"You" Message: *You're such a slob. I can't trust you with anything.*

"I" Message: _____

_____

Situation: Your friend takes your bike without asking.

"You: Message: *Don't ever take my bike again. I always ask you when I want to borrow something. Why don't you have the courtesy to ask?*

"I" Message: _____

_____

Situation: A friend has talked about you behind your back.

"You" Message: *You're mean. A real friend doesn't talk about you behind your back.*

"I" Message: _____

_____

I Can See It All Now

Why

By having the students visualize a time when they acted assertively in the past, you reinforce their ability to be assertive in the present and future.

How

You may wish to play soft classical or new-age music in the background during this exercise.

Tell the students to relax and close their eyes. Ask them to bring to mind a time when they acted assertively. Then, in a pleasant, soothing voice, read the following directions:

This may have been a time when you asked for what you wanted or stood up for something you believed in. (Pause.) See the other person clearly, and recall what the situation was about. (Pause.) What did the other person do? (Pause.) What did he or she say? (Pause.) How did you respond to the other person? (Pause.) What were the reactions of other people involved? (Pause.) Think of a time when you acted either aggressively or passively. (Pause) What was the situation? (Pause.) Who was involved? (Pause.) What did you say? (Pause.) What did you do? (Pause.) What did the other person say or do? (Pause.) How did everyone feel afterwards? (Pause.) How was this different from the time you acted assertively? (Pause.) When you're ready, open your eyes.

Discuss some of the assertive behaviors that the students recalled during the visualization. Compare them to the aggressive and passive behaviors they pictured. Encourage the students to discuss what they accomplished and how they felt as a result of each type of behavior. Examine the consequences of all three styles of behavior.

Assertive Track Record

Why

Having students keep a record of when they exercise their basic personal rights by acting assertively reinforces these behaviors and encourages the students to act similarly in future situations that call for assertive behavior.

When

Use this activity following the "I" message role plays as a way of reinforcing the use of assertive behaviors.

How

1. Give each student a copy of the "Assertive Track Record" activity sheet.
2. Direct the students to keep the activity sheet with them at all times for one week, and to record their assertive behaviors.
3. Offer several realistic examples, such as:
   —*You tell a teacher you do not understand the homework assignment and need help.*
   —*You refuse to do something with a friend.*
   —*You ask a person you don't know very well to go somewhere with you.*
   —*You tell your parents you would like a larger allowance.*

Activity Sheet

Assertiveness Track Record

Every time you are assertive, write it down! Describe the situation, your thoughts and feelings, and the response of the other person or people involved.

Date	Situation and People Involved	Your Thoughts and Feelings	Response of Other(s)

Time Management

Get Organized and Get Things Done

We are all allotted equal numbers of seconds, minutes, hours, and days. We often think in terms of "saving" time, but no such possibility exists; we can only "spend" it. We must wisely use the time we have or forfeit it. It would be wonderful to have an account in which to horde caches of time until we really need it, but that is simply not the way time works. How well we *manage* time determines whether we are its master or slave.

Students can gain greater control in their lives by learning to manage their time skillfully. Having students inventory their daily activities will help them determine how much time they truly utilize and how much they squander, and then devise strategies for eliminating time-wasters. In order for time management to work, students need to plan. Those who think they don't have time for planning and organization are usually the ones who need it most. Time invested in planning pays powerful dividends.

Planning Relieves Uncertainty and Guilt

In a practical sense, time can be equated to the series of small and large decisions that ultimately shape one's life. Today's students, even more than those of past generations, must carefully plan their activities in order to have enough time for work, family, friends, fun, and fitness. When they have too much to do and not enough time to do it, they experience stress. Good time-management habits can minimize frustration, deadline and avoidance anxieties, work fatigue, and guilt.

Usually students are told that they must work before they play. If they engage in recreational activities before completing their work, they may feel guilty, which puts a punishing edge on their enjoyment. In addition, the benefits of recreation are significantly reduced when a student knows he or she should be completing some task. Guilt is one of the heavier prices we pay for playing when we don't believe we have earned the right. Recreation associated with guilt provides little or no stress relief.

Symptoms of Poor Time Management

Some causes of stress are subject to immediate modification. Solve the problem and the stress goes away. Time management is one of those

areas where a complete cure is possible, if we recognize the symptoms:

- frequent rushing
- feeling overwhelmed by tasks
- frequently engaging in undesired activities
- too little time for family and friends
- frequent missed deadlines
- often late for appointments, meetings, etc.
- lengthy stretches of time with no productive activity
- frequently having to choose between unpleasant alternatives

Remember the 80/20 rule: twenty percent of the tasks we do produce eighty percent of the rewards. One of the keys to effective time management is recognizing which activities belong in that high-producing twenty percent, and scheduling time to accomplish them.

Four Steps to Good Time Management

Effective time management relies on an interplay of critical life skills. The basic steps are:

1. Establish short-term and long-range goals.
2. Identify and prioritize tasks required to accomplish those goals.
3. Realistically schedule time, postponing or eliminating low- priority tasks.
4. Learn how to make effective decisions on a day-to-day basis.

In order to adhere to their plans and achieve their goals, students need to eliminate low-priority activities and say no to people and projects that 1) do nothing to further their goals, or 2) they really don't want to do. Younger students and older ones whose parents exert a great deal of authority over their choices can be urged to include their parents in goal-setting and planning exercises.

Resentment is bound to build when too much time is spent on work and too little on relaxing and enjoying the company of friends. With careful planning and realistic scheduling, students can have time for more of everything. They must generate a balance between school, work, home, and leisure and plan their recreation and leisure hours as carefully as their school/work hours. Work hours are more productive and satisfying when recreation and leisure needs are met.

Caution students to build in time for a variety of interruptions and to accommodate the unforeseen. Surprises are bound to occur. Rigid plans and tight deadlines invite derailment. One of the best techniques students can employ is to set aside some personal quiet time during which to relax and to plan and reflect on scheduling priorities.

Help students cultivate the ability to identify the tasks that need to be completed, create to-do lists, set priorities, decide which tasks need the most attention, and structure the day so that the important tasks are accomplished first. Urge students again and again to stay focused on their goals. And remind them to acknowledge themselves for their accomplishments at the end of each day.

Time Management Inventory

Why

To manage their time well, students need to know how they *spend* their time. All students engage in time wasters that hinder their ability to accomplish their goals. Taking a time inventory helps students identify time-wasters, and gives them a base from which to decide whether to eliminate, reduce, maintain, or increase the time they spend on particular activities.

How

1. Distribute several copies of the "Time Management Inventory" activity sheet to each student.

2. Direct the students to record their activities over a three-day period. Suggest that they carry a sheet with them throughout the day and fill it in as they go. They may think that they will be able to recall their activities at the end of the day, but will likely find this a difficult if not impossible task.

3. Ask the students to code each activity to show the degree of satisfaction they experienced. A (+) means the student is satisfied that the time was spent productively. A (0) means the student is not satisfied but feels the activity was necessary and required some amount of time. A (-) means the student is dissatisfied and believes the activity was unnecessary.

4. After three days, have the students total the amount of time spent in categories such as socializing; family activities; in-class time, homework, phone calls; commuting; shopping; errands; employment; eating; household chores; quiet recreation, such as watching television, reading, and listening to music; and active recreation, such as playing tennis, bicycling, and dancing.

5. Ask the students to judge whether or not they are satisfied with the amount of time spent on each major category of activities.

Activity Sheet

Time Management Inventory

Directions: List all of your activities for three consecutive days. At the end of each day, go back and indicate how satisfied you were with the amount of time you spent on each activity. Put a + next to activities that were necessary and on which you spent about the right amount of time. Put a **0** next to activities that were necessary but on which you spent too much or too little time. Put a - next to activities that were both unnecessary and unsatisfying.

Date_____

Time	**Activity**	**Satisfaction**
6:00 a.m.		
6:30 a.m.		
7:00 a.m.		
7:30 a.m.		
8:00 a.m.		
8:30 a.m.		
9:00 a.m.		
9:30 a.m.		
10:00 a.m.		
10:30 a.m.		
11:00 a.m.		
11:30 a.m.		
12:00 p.m.		

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Time	Activity	Satisfaction
12:30 p.m.		
1:00 p.m.		
1:30 p.m.		
2:00 p.m.		
2:30 p.m.		
3:00 p.m.		
3:30 p.m.		
4:00 p.m.		
4:30 p.m.		
5:00 p.m.		
5:30 p.m.		
6:00 p.m.		
6:30 p.m.		
7:00 p.m.		
7:30 p.m.		
8:00 p.m.		
8:30 p.m.		
9:00 p.m.		
9:30 p.m.		
10:00 p.m.		
10:30 p.m.		
11:00 p.m.		

Goal-Getting List

Why

In order to use time-management skills effectively, students have to know what they want to accomplish in the time available to them. In other words, *they must have goals*. The concept of a goal is likely to be more unfamiliar (and intimidating) to students than the process of setting one. Students set goals all the time; they simply are not accustomed to labeling as goals the outcomes they desire. "I want to get an 'A' in that class," is a goal statement. "I want to finish my homework this afternoon so that I can go to the game tonight," is a goal statement with obvious time-management implications. What's different here is the notion that goals *drive* time management, and that goals need to be consciously formulated, written down, and reflective of long-range as well as short-term desires.

How

Introduce the concept of goals. Discuss the importance of goals in planning the use of time. Mention several categories of goals, such as education, career, family, personal, health/fitness, financial, and spiritual.

Using a timer, have the students spend eight minutes developing a list of short-term and long-range goals. In the first two minutes, have the students write down goals they would like to accomplish within the next five years. In the second two minutes, have them list one-year goals. In the third two minutes, have them list six-month goals. In the last two minutes, have the students write down their goals for the coming month.

Ask the students to look over their lists and assign an A, B or C priority to each goal. The A's are the most important goals. The B's are goals that are important, but less so than the A's. Action on these goals can be postponed without jeopardizing the future. The C's are the least important goals, on which action can be put off indefinitely.

Have the students compile the A's from each of their lists into a single list. Point out that these are the goals for which students must establish a plan and a time table. Tell the students to keep this list posted and to refer to it when they are writing "to do" lists and planning weekly or monthly schedules. Urge them to make a conscious effort to regularly assign time to the steps required in meeting these goals.

Daily TO-DO Lists

Why

Students who regularly make to-do lists have a much greater chance of accomplishing their goals. Trying to remember appointments, homework assignments, meetings, and other tasks robs students of energy and attention more properly devoted to the business at hand, whether that be listening, leading, computing, reading, studying, or relating. Once a to-do list is written, students no longer have to worry about remembering—they merely have to train themselves to refer to the list several times a day. Making to-do lists also allows students to prioritize their activities so that the most important tasks are handled first.

When

Urge students to make a to-do list daily, either first thing in the morning or, better still, the night before. Being clear about what has to be accomplished tomorrow relieves stress and promotes more restful sleep.

How

Distribute several copies of the "TO-DO List" activity sheet to each student. Guide the students through the process of filling out the first sheet in class. Fill out one yourself, as a model.

Remind the students of their short-term and long-range goals. If they have done planning around each of their goals, they will know what tasks they must accomplish before the goal can be realized. Have the students list the most immediate of these tasks on their first "TO-DO List," along with appointments, meetings, chores, homework assignments, etc.

Discuss the prioritization process and show the students how you would prioritize the tasks on your own "TO-DO List," using the A, B, C method.

Urge the students to keep their list with them throughout the following day, checking off each task as it is completed. Point out that the questions at the bottom of the sheet are intended to help them review their accomplishments at the end of the day.

As soon as possible after the target day on which they use their "TO-DO List," give the students an opportunity to discuss the experience. Reinforce them for accomplishing the tasks they set out to do, and encourage them to use positive self-talk to reinforce and reward themselves.

Activity Sheet

TO-DO List

Directions: In the **To-Do** column, list tasks you want to complete today. If the task *must* be completed, check the **A** column; if it would be nice to complete it today, check the **B** column, and if it can wait without creating a problem, check the **C** column. Write down your estimate of how long each task will take. When you have finished the task, check the "**Completed**" column. Prioritize your **A** tasks. Complete your most important **A** task first, and move through the list completing the remainder of the **A** tasks. Then, prioritize the **B** tasks and complete as many as you have time for.

A	B	C	To-Do Tasks	Time Estimate	Completed (√)

(Continued on Next Page)

A	B	C	To-Do Tasks	Time Estimate	Completed (√)

Review your list. How many A items did you complete?

How accurate were your time estimates?

Which accomplishment are you most proud of?

Sharing Circles

Safety in Numbers

One of the most helpful classroom strategies you can use to further your goals in the area of stress management is a unique small-group discussion process called the sharing circle. The sharing circle is an extremely effective process for promoting teacher-student and student-student interaction. In a sharing circle, students take turns expressing their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in response to a specific topic. The circle is loosely structured and is guided by a set of rules that ensures attentive listening, safety, privacy, and mutual respect.

Let's face it, everyone needs an audience—particularly young people. They need to know that someone will be there to hear what they have to say. Ideally, you as a teacher or counselor are always ready to listen. However, practically, you cannot afford to give your undivided attention to more than a few students (for a few moments) in the course of a day. The sharing circle serves as your ally in this regard, by providing a specific time and place where you become *first and foremost* a good listener for your students, and where they become good listeners for each other.

Sharing circles may be used to address the issue of stress management directly, or they may used as a technique for managing stress in the classroom. There is a difference. For example, topics such as, "What I Do When the Going Gets Tough" and "My Favorite Way to Relax" fall into the former category. They allow you and students to share and discuss different approaches to managing stress. Topics such as, "Something That Worries Me" and "Something That Makes Me Happy" belong to the latter category. They give you and students an opportunity to express feelings and concerns in the safe, caring milieu of the circle. The sharing circle works equally well in meeting both purposes.

Complete directions for several sharing circles are included in this section. Make those the first circles you implement. You will need the step-by-step directions while you are familiarizing yourself with the process. Later, when you have become accustomed to leading sharing circles, choose from the list of additional topics at the end of this section. Those topics are grouped to correlate with the major components of stress management outlined in this book.

At first glance, the sharing circle is likely to appear deceptively simple. However, adhering to established sharing circle procedures and

rules is critical to its effective implementation. Please do not attempt to lead a sharing circle until you have read the appropriate introductory sections that follow.

You will notice that all sharing circles conclude with two or more open-ended discussion questions. The discussion phase of the circle always follows and is completely separate from the sharing phase. When students share on a topic related to stress, use the discussion phase to refocus their attention on important concepts of stress management that you want to reinforce. Discussion challenges students to reach beyond the immediate range of each circle topic—to make a connection, describe a relationship, formulate a theory, or draw a conclusion. With skillful facilitation, discussions are a primary means of helping the students internalize what they have learned.

Leading Sharing Circles

This section is a thorough guide for conducting sharing circles. It covers major points to keep in mind and answers questions which will arise as you begin using the activities. Please remember that these guidelines are presented to assist you, not to restrict you. Follow them and trust your own leadership style at the same time.

Sharing Circle Procedures

1. Setting up the circle (1-2 minutes)
2. Reviewing the ground rules (1-2 minutes) *
3. Introducing the topic (1-2 minutes)
4. Sharing by circle members (12-18 minutes)
5. Reviewing what is shared (3-5 minutes) *
6. Summary discussion (2-8 minutes)
7. Closing the circle (less than 1 minute)

*optional

Setting up the circle (1-2 minutes)

As you sit down with the students in the circle, remember that you are not teaching a lesson. You are facilitating a group of people. Establish a positive atmosphere. In a relaxed manner, address each person by name, using eye contact and conveying warmth. An attitude of seriousness blended with enthusiasm will let the students know that the sharing circle is an important learning experience—an activity that can be interesting and meaningful.

Reviewing the ground rules (1-2 minutes).

At the beginning of the first session, and at appropriate intervals thereafter, go over the ground rules for the sharing circle. They are:

Sharing Circle Rules

1. Bring yourself to the circle and nothing else.
2. Everyone gets a turn to share, including the leader.
3. You can skip your turn if you wish.
4. Listen to the person who is sharing.
5. The time is shared equally.
6. Stay in your own space.
7. There are no interruptions, probing, put-downs, or gossip.

From this point on, demonstrate to the students that you expect them to remember and abide by the ground rules. Convey that you think well of them and know they are fully capable of responsible behavior. Let them know that by coming to the session they are making a commitment to listen and show acceptance and respect for the other students and you.

Introducing the topic (1-2 minutes)

State the topic in your own words. Elaborate and provide examples as each activity suggests. Add clarifying statements of your own that will help the students understand the topic. Answer questions about the topic, and emphasize that there are no "right" responses. Finally, restate the topic, opening the session to responses (theirs and yours). Sometimes taking your turn first helps the students understand the aim of the topic. At various points throughout the session, state the topic again.

Just prior to leading a sharing circle, contemplate the topic and think of at least one possible response that *you* can make to it.

Sharing by circle members (12-18 minutes)

The most important point to remember is this: The purpose of the sharing circle is to give students an opportunity to express themselves and be accepted for the experiences, thoughts, and feelings they share. Avoid taking the action away from the circle members. They are the stars!

Reviewing what is shared (optional 3-5 minutes)

Besides modeling effective listening (the very best way to teach it) and positively reinforcing students for attentive listening, a review can be used to deliberately improve listening skills in circle members.

Reviewing is a time for reflective listening, when circle members feed back what they heard each other say during the sharing phase of the circle. Besides encouraging effective listening, reviewing provides circle members with additional recognition. It validates their experience and conveys the idea, "you are important," a message we can all profit from hearing often.

To review, a circle member simply addresses someone who shared, and briefly paraphrases what the person said ("John, I heard you say....").

The first few times you conduct reviews, stress the importance of checking with the speaker to see if the review accurately summarized the main things that were shared. If the speaker says, "No," allow him or her to make corrections. Stress too, the importance of speaking *directly* to the speaker, using the person's name and the pronoun "you," not "he" or "she." If someone says, "She or he said that...," intervene as promptly and respectfully as possible and say to the reviewer, "Talk to Betty...Say you." This is very important. The person whose turn is being reviewed will have a totally different feeling when talked *to*, instead of *about*.

Note: Remember that the review is optional and is most effective when used *occasionally*, not as a part of every circle.

Summary discussion (2-8 minutes)

The summary discussion is the cognitive portion of the sharing circle. During this phase, the leader asks thought-provoking questions to stimulate free discussion and higher-level thinking. Each sharing circle in the book includes two or more summary questions; however, at times you may want to formulate questions that are more appropriate to the level of understanding in your group—or to what was actually shared in the circle. If you wish to make connections between the sharing circle topic and stress management or a particular subject area, ask questions that will accomplish that objective and allow the summary discussion to extend longer.

It is important that you not confuse the summary with the review. The review is optional; the summary is not. The summary meets the need of people of all ages to find meaning in what they do. Thus, the summary serves as a necessary culmination to each sharing circle by allowing the students to clarify the key concepts they gained from the session.

Closing the circle (less than 1 minute).

The ideal time to end a sharing circle is when the summary discussion reaches natural closure. Sincerely thank everyone for being part of the

circle. Don't thank specific students for speaking, as doing so might convey the impression that speaking is more appreciated than mere listening. Then close the circle by saying, "The sharing circle is over," or "Okay, that ends our session."

More about Sharing Circle Procedures and Rules

The next few paragraphs offer further clarification concerning sharing circle leadership.

Why should students bring themselves to the circle and nothing else? Individual teachers differ on this point, but most prefer that students not bring objects (such as pencils, books, etc.) to the circle that may be distracting.

Who gets to talk? Everyone. The importance of acceptance cannot be overly stressed. In one way or another practically every ground rule says one thing: *accept one another*. When you model acceptance of students, they will learn how to be accepting. Each individual in the circle is important and deserves a turn to speak if she or he wishes to take it. Equal opportunity to become involved should be given to everyone in the circle.

Circle members should be reinforced equally for their contributions. There are many reasons why a leader may become more enthused over what one student shares than another. The response may be more on target, reflect more depth, be more entertaining, be philosophically more in keeping with one's own point of view, and so on. However, students need to be given equal recognition for their contributions, even if the contribution is to listen silently throughout the session.

In most of the sharing circles, plan to take a turn and address the topic, too. Students usually appreciate it very much and learn a great deal when their teachers and counselors are willing to tell about their own experiences, thoughts, and feelings. In this way you let your students know that you acknowledge your own humanness.

Does everyone have to take a turn? No. Students may choose to skip their turns. If the circle becomes a pressure situation in which the members are coerced in any way to speak, it will become an unsafe place where participants are not comfortable. Meaningful discussion is unlikely in such an atmosphere. By allowing students to make this choice, you are showing them that you accept their right to remain silent if that is what they choose to do.

As you begin circles, it will be to your advantage if one or more students decline to speak. If you are unperturbed and accepting when this happens, you let them know you are offering them an opportunity to experience something you think is valuable, or at least worth a try, and not attempting to force-feed them. You as a leader should not feel compelled to share a personal experience in every session, either. However, if you decline to speak in most of the sessions, this may have an inhibiting effect on the students' willingness to share.

A word should also be said about how this ground rule has sometimes been carried to extremes. Sometimes leaders have bent over backwards to let students know they don't have to take a turn. This seeming lack of enthusiasm on the part of the leader has caused reticence in the students. In order to avoid this outcome, don't project any personal insecurity as you lead the session. Be confident in your proven ability to work with students. Expect something to happen and it will.

Some circle leaders ask the participants to raise their hands when they wish to speak, while others simply allow free verbal sharing without soliciting the leader's permission first. Choose the procedure that works best for you, but do not call on anyone unless you can see signs of readiness.

Some leaders have reported that their first circles fell flat—that no one, or just one or two students, had anything to say. But they continued to have circles, and at a certain point everything changed. Thereafter, the students had a great deal to say that these leaders considered worth waiting for. It appears that in these cases the leaders' acceptance of the right to skip turns was a key factor. In time most students will contribute verbally when they have something they want to say, and when they are assured there is no pressure to do so.

Sometimes a silence occurs during a sharing circle. Don't feel you have to jump in every time someone stops talking. During silences students have an opportunity to think about what they would like to share or to contemplate an important idea they've heard. A general rule of thumb is to allow silence to the point that you observe group discomfort. At that point move on. *Do not switch to another topic.* To do so implies you will not be satisfied until the students speak. If you change to another topic, you are telling them you didn't really mean it when you said they didn't have to take a turn if they didn't want to.

If you are bothered about students who attend a number of circles and still do not share verbally, reevaluate what you consider to be involvement. Participation does not necessarily mean talking. Students who do not speak *are* listening and learning.

How can I encourage effective listening? The sharing circle is a time (and place) for students and leaders to strengthen the habit of listening by doing it over and over again. No one was born knowing how to listen effectively to others. It is a skill like any other that gets better as it is practiced. In the immediacy of the sharing circle, the members become keenly aware of the necessity to listen, and most students respond by expecting it of one another.

In ***Classroom Connections***, listening is defined as the respectful focusing of attention on individual speakers. It includes eye contact with the speaker and open body posture. It eschews interruptions of any kind. When you conduct a sharing circle, listen and encourage listening in the students by (l) focusing your attention on the person who is speaking, (2) being receptive to what the speaker is saying (not mentally planning your next remark), and (3) recognizing the speaker when s/he finishes speaking, either verbally ("Thanks, Shirley") or nonverbally (a nod and a smile).

To encourage effective listening in the students, reinforce them by letting them know you have noticed they were listening to each other and you appreciate it. Occasionally conducting a review after the sharing phase also has the effect of sharpening listening skills.

How can I ensure the students get equal time? When circle members share the time equally, they demonstrate their acceptance of the notion that everyone's contribution is of equal importance. It is not uncommon to have at least one dominator in a group. This person is usually totally unaware that by continuing to talk s/he is taking time from others who are less assertive.

Be very clear with the students about the purpose of this ground rule. Tell them at the outset how much time there is and whether or not you plan to conduct a review. When it is your turn, always limit your own contribution. If someone goes on and on, do intervene (dominators need to know what they are doing), but do so as gently and respectfully as you can.

What are some examples of put-downs? Put-downs convey the message, "You are not okay as you are." Some put-downs are deliberate, but many are made unknowingly. Both kinds are undesirable in a sharing circle because they destroy the atmosphere of acceptance and disrupt the flow of discussion. Typical put-downs include:

- overquestioning.
- statements that have the effect of teaching or preaching

- advice giving
- one-upsmanship
- criticism, disapproval, or objections
- sarcasm
- statements or questions of disbelief

How can I deal with put-downs? There are two major ways for dealing with put-downs in sharing circles: preventing them from occurring and intervening when they do.

Going over the ground rules with the students at the beginning of each session, particularly in the earliest sessions, is a helpful preventive technique. Another is to reinforce the students when they adhere to the rule. Be sure to use nonpatronizing, nonevaluative language.

Unacceptable behavior should be stopped the moment it is recognized by the leader. When you become aware that a put-down is occurring, do whatever you ordinarily do to stop destructive behavior in the classroom. If one student gives another an unasked-for bit of advice, say for example, "Jane, please give Alicia a chance to tell her story." To a student who interrupts say, "Ed, it's Sally's turn." In most cases the fewer words, the better—students automatically tune out messages delivered as lectures.

Sometimes students disrupt the group by starting a private conversation with the person next to them. Touch the offender on the arm or shoulder while continuing to give eye contact to the student who is speaking. If you can't reach the offender, simply remind him/her of the rule about listening. If students persist in putting others down during sharing circles, ask to see them at another time and hold a brief one-to-one conference, urging them to follow the rules. Suggest that they reconsider their membership in the circle. Make it clear that if they don't intend to honor the ground rules, they are not to come to the circle.

How can I keep students from gossiping? Periodically remind students that using names and sharing embarrassing information is not acceptable. Urge the students to relate personally to one another, but not to tell intimate details of their lives.

What should the leader do during the summary discussion? Conduct the summary as an open forum, giving students the opportunity to discuss a variety of ideas and accept those that make sense to them. Don't impose your opinions on the students, or allow the students to impose theirs on one another. Ask open-ended questions, encourage higher-level thinking, contribute your own ideas when appropriate, and act as a facilitator.

Organizing Sharing Circles

Group Size and Composition

Sharing circles are a time for focusing on individuals' contributions in an unhurried fashion. For this reason, each sharing circle group needs to be kept relatively small—eight to twelve usually works best at the middle to upper elementary grades and through high school. At this age, students are capable of extensive verbalization. You will want to encourage this, and not stifle them because of time constraints. For the younger children, smaller circles might work best.

Each group should be as **heterogeneous** as possible with respect to sex, ability, and racial/ethnic background. Sometimes there will be a group in which all the students are particularly reticent to speak. At these times, bring in an expressive student or two who will get things going. Sometimes it is necessary for practical reasons to change the membership of a group. Once established, however, it is advisable to keep a group as stable as possible.

Length and Location of Sharing Circles

Most sharing circles last approximately 20 minutes, sometimes a little longer. At first students tend to be reluctant to express themselves fully because they do not yet know that the circle is a safe place. Consequently your first sessions may not last more than 10 to 15 minutes. Generally speaking, students become comfortable and motivated to speak with continued experience.

Sharing circles may be conducted at any time during the day and may be carried out wherever there is room for students to sit in a circle and experience few or no distractions. Most leaders prefer to have students sit in chairs rather than on the floor. Students seem to be less apt to invade one another's space while seated in chairs. Some leaders conduct sessions outdoors, with students seated in a secluded, grassy area.

How to Get Started

Teachers and counselors have used numerous methods to involve students in the circle process. What works well for one leader or class does not always work for another. Here are two basic strategies leaders have successfully used to set up groups. Whichever you use, we recommend that you post a chart listing the sharing circle rules and procedures to which every participant may refer (see "**Leading Sharing Circles**").

1. **Start one group at a time, and cycle through all groups.** If possible, provide an opportunity for every person to experience a sharing circle in a setting where there are no disturbances. This may mean arranging for another staff member or aide to take charge of the students not participating in the circle. Non-participants may work on course work or activity sheets, or, if you have a cooperative librarian, they may be sent to the library to work independently or in small groups on a class assignment. Repeat this procedure until all of the students have been involved in at least one sharing circle.

   Next, initiate a class discussion about the sharing circles. Explain that from now on you will be meeting with each circle group in the classroom, with the remainder of the class present. Ask the students to help you plan established procedures for the remainder of the class to follow.

   Meet with each sharing circle group on a different day, systematically cycling through the groups. In your second or third cycle, begin student leadership training. In each group, allow a student the opportunity to lead the session as you sit beside him/her, acting as leader-trainer. In time, student-led groups may meet independently at staggered times during the period, or they may meet simultaneously in different parts of the room while you circulate. Eventually you should be able to be a participant in the student-led groups. For more information on student leadership, refer to the heading, "Training Student Leaders" later in this section.

2. **Combine inner and outer circles.** Meet with one sharing circle group while another group listens and observes as an outer circle. Then have the two groups change places, with the students on the outside becoming the inner circle, and responding verbally to the topic. Later, a third group may be added to this alternating cycle. The end product of this arrangement is two or more groups (comprising everyone in the class) meeting together simultaneously. While one group is involved in discussion, the other groups listen and observe as members of an outer circle. *Invite the members of the outer circle to participate in the review and discussion phases of the circle.*

What to Do with the Rest of the Class

A number of arrangements can be made for students who are not participating in sharing circles. Here are some ideas:

- **Arrange the room to ensure privacy.** This may involve placing a circle of chairs or carpeting in a corner, away from other work

areas. You might construct dividers from existing furniture, such as bookshelves or screens, or simply arrange chairs and tables in such a way that the circle area is protected from distractions.

- **Involve aides, counselors, parents, or fellow teachers.** Have an aide conduct a lesson with the rest of the class while you meet with a circle group. If you do not have an aide assigned to you, use auxiliary staff or volunteer parents.
- **Have students work quietly on subject-area assignments in pairs or small, task-oriented groups.**
- **Utilize student aides or leaders.** If the seat-work activity is in a content area, appoint students who show ability in that area as "consultants," and have them assist other students.
- **Give the students plenty to do.** List assignments on the board. Make materials for quiet individual activities available so that students cannot run out of things to do and be tempted to consult you or disturb others.
- **Make the activity of students outside the circle enjoyable.** When you can involve the rest of the class in something meaningful to them, they will probably be less likely to interrupt the circle.
- **Have the students work on an ongoing project.** When they have a task in progress, students can simply resume where they left off, with little or no introduction from you. In these cases, appointing a "person in charge," "group leader", or "consultant" is wise.
- **Allow individual journal-writing.** While a circle is in progress, have the other students make entries in a private (or share-with-teacher-only) journal. Do not correct the journals, but if you read them, be sure to respond to the entries with your own written thoughts, where appropriate.

Training Student Leaders

A basic assumption of ***Classroom Connections*** is that every human being (barring those having considerable subnormal intelligence) has leadership potential. Further, the best time for energizing this ability is during the developing years. Students in countless elementary and secondary classrooms effectively lead their own sharing circles.

You can begin training student leaders after two or three successful sharing circles. Invite the students to consider volunteering to lead a circle. Suggest that they watch you closely to see what steps the leader follows. At the end of the session, ask the students to describe what you did. They should be able to delineate the following steps:

The leader:

1. announces the topic and clarifies what it is about.

2. may lead a review of the ground rules.
3. gives each person a turn who wants one.
4. may conduct a review of what each person said.
5. conducts a summary discussion by focusing on the meaning of the session and the major observations of the participants.
6. terminates the circle.

Ask the students if anyone would like to volunteer to lead the next session. If no one volunteers, accept this outcome and wait a session or two before trying again. If several volunteer, choose a student who you think is very likely to succeed. Then tell the group the topic you have in mind for the next session.

Before the next session, give the student leader a copy of the activity, and discuss it with him/her. Also provide a copy of the sharing circle rules and procedures (see "**Leading Sharing Circles**"). As the session begins, tell the group that you will be the trainer and speak about the process when necessary, but that otherwise, the student is the leader and you are a participant. Before turning the session over to the student leader add one more thing—a new ground rule stating that the students are expected to respect fully the leadership position of the student. **If they disagree with the student leader's procedure or are aware of what he or she should do next when the student leader may have forgotten, they are not to say anything at that time unless they are asked to by the student leader.** When people are learning a new skill, it can be very upsetting to have other people constantly reminding them of what they are supposed to do next. For this reason the student leader should not be heckled in any way. (Time can be taken at the end of the session for the group to give feedback to the student leader about his or her performance).

Now, allow the student leader to proceed, interjecting statements yourself about the procedure only when absolutely necessary. Be sure to take your turn and model respectful listening. As necessary, deal with students who interrupt or distract the group.

Before ending the session, thank the student leader, and conduct a brief feedback session by asking the students, "Who would like to tell (the student leader) what you liked about the way he or she conducted the session?" Let the student leader call on each person who has a comment.

Tell the students the topic you have in mind for the next session, and ask for a volunteer to lead it. Remember that students should not lead the group until you are sure they will be successful. Be careful to appoint leaders of both sexes and all racial/ethnic groups. Continue this process until all who wish to conduct circles are competent enough to lead them independently.

Combining Teacher and Student Leadership

This procedure allows several groups to meet simultaneously during the same class period.

Begin by announcing to the class that circles will be held during the day. If necessary, review the ground rules with the whole class. Then announce the topic, describe it and restate it. Finally, take your turn to relate to it personally. Answer any questions the students have, and then ask them to get into their groups.

When the circles are formed, the student leaders take over. They restate the topic and facilitate the sharing phase and, if desired, a review. The students return to their regular seating for the summary discussion, which is led by the teacher.

Note: This is a particularly fruitful procedure if you wish to use the summary discussion to reinforce the stress management concepts and techniques presented in ***Classroom Connections.***

Sharing Circle

Something That Causes Me Stress

WHAT THIS SHARING CIRCLE TEACHES:

- All of us experience stress at times.
- Many different things can cause stress.
- Feelings of stress are normal.

DIRECTIONS: Have the students form a circle and tell them: *Before we begin this sharing circle, let's review the ground rules. Who can tell us what some of them are?* Discuss the ground rules in a positive way, adding any that the students forget to mention.

Introduce the topic: *Our topic for this session is, "Something That Causes Me Stress."*

Elaborate: *Do you ever get tongue tied? Feel uptight or on edge? Get a headache or a queasy stomach when you're not sick? Chances are the cause of those feelings is stress. Many different things can cause stress—worrying about a test, feeling angry at someone, or not getting enough sleep, for example. Even good things can cause stress—like the excitement of waiting for a special event. Think of something that causes you stress and tell us about it. What happens to cause the stress, and how does it affect the way you feel, the thoughts you have, and the things you do? Take a few minutes to think about it. The topic is, "Something That Causes Me Stress."*

Invite the students to take turns speaking. Listen carefully to each one and encourage the other students to do the same. Don't allow negative interruptions. Be sure to take a turn yourself.

Optional: After everyone who wants a turn has had one, ask if anyone can remember what another person said. Let the students tell each other what they heard, and acknowledge them for good listening.

Summary: After each student who wants to speak has done so, ask the group:

—Do the same kinds of things frequently cause you stress?

—If you know something is likely to stress you, what can you do about it?

—Do feelings of stress do us any good? Explain your answer.

Sharing Circle

What I Do When the Going Gets Tough

WHAT THIS SHARING CIRCLE TEACHES:

- All of us know how to do something positive to make ourselves feel better when things are tough.
- There are many positive ways to handle stress.

DIRECTIONS: Gather the students into a circle and tell them: *Before we begin this sharing circle, let's review the ground rules. Who can tell us what some of them are?* Discuss the ground rules in a positive way, adding any that the students forget to mention.

Introduce the topic: *Our topic for this session is, "What I Do When the Going Gets Tough."*

Elaborate: *Most of us have ways to make ourselves feel better when we're stressed. What's one of your ways? What do you do to help yourself when you feel angry, worried, tense, or nervous? Maybe you talk to one of your parents or to a friend about what's bothering you. Or perhaps you take a long walk or bike ride. Spending time alone with your pet may make you feel better. Or perhaps you do something to take your mind off the stressful situation—like watching TV, going to a movie, or reading a book. Tell us what you do, and how you feel when you do it. Let's think it over for a few moments. The topic is, "What I Do When the Going Gets Tough."*

Invite the students to take turns sharing. Listen carefully to each student and encourage the other students to do the same. Don't allow negative interruptions. Remember to take a turn yourself.

Optional: When everyone who wants a turn has had one, ask the students to briefly restate what they heard another person say. Explain that this type of review helps improve listening skills.

Summary: After the students have finished sharing, use these questions to start a discussion:

—*Why is it important to find positive ways to handle stress?*
—*What are some negative ways in which people try to handle stress?*
—*Do you think fewer people would use alcohol and drugs if they knew how to handle stress in more positive ways?*

Sharing Circle

Something I Did for Myself When I Was Sick

WHAT THIS SHARING CIRCLE TEACHES:

- Doing something for ourselves when we are sick helps us get well.
- We can take care of ourselves in many ways.

DIRECTIONS: Invite the students to form a circle. Have them review the sharing circle ground rules by asking: *Does anyone want to tell us one of the rules he or she remembers?* See if the students can come up with all of the rules.

Introduce the topic: *The topic for today's circle session is, "Something I Did for Myself When I Was Sick."*

Elaborate: *We have all been sick at one time or another, and have learned some things we can do to get well again. Think of a time when you were sick, and you did something good for yourself to help you get better. It could have been that you drank a lot of liquids when you had a cold, or that you washed off a scraped knee with soap and water before you put on the bandage. Maybe you played soft music and rested when you had a headache. Whatever it was, you did it yourself, and it helped make you better. Let's take a minute to think about it silently before we share. The topic is, "Something I Did for Myself When I Was Sick."*

Allow each student to have a turn speaking, and encourage attentive listening. If necessary, take a turn first, to help evoke memories in the minds of students who can't think of anything right away. Thank each person for sharing.

Optional: After everyone has had a chance to share, ask the students if they can remember and restate what another person in the circle said. Acknowledge them for good listening.

Summary: When the circle session is finished, summarize by asking:
—Why is it important to take care of ourselves when we are sick?
—How does taking care of ourselves when we feel stressed help keep us well?

Sharing Circle

Something I Do to Take Care of My Body

WHAT THIS SHARING CIRCLE TEACHES:

- There are several important ways we can take care of our bodies.
- Who we are physically depends on the choices we make about our bodies.

DIRECTIONS: Ask the students to form a circle and say to them: *Before we begin the sharing circle, let's review the ground rules.* If any ground rules haven't been followed in previous sessions, discuss the importance of them in a positive way.

Introduce the topic: *Our topic for this session is, "Something I Do to Take Care of My Body."*

Elaborate: *What is something you do on a regular basis that you know is good for you physically? Maybe you always take time to eat breakfast. Perhaps you play on an athletic team, or get some other form of physical exercise. Do you like to munch on raw carrots or drink lots of water? Do you visit the dentist regularly? Get plenty of sleep? Plan never to smoke or use drugs? When you describe the thing you do, tell us how you feel about it. Do you do it because you have to, or because you want to? Take a moment or two to think about it. The topic is, "Something I Do to Take Care of My Body."*

Invite the students to take turns speaking. Listen carefully to each one and encourage the other students to do the same. Don't allow negative interruptions. Be sure to take a turn yourself.

Optional: After everyone who wants a turn has had one, ask if anyone can remember what another person said. Let the students tell each other what they heard, and acknowledge them for good listening.

Summary: After each person who wants to speak has done so, ask the students:

—What are some things we can do to take care of ourselves physically?
—What kinds of foods are best for us?
—Why is exercise important?
—Why do you think some people neglect their bodies?

Sharing Circle

A Time I Resisted Something I Knew Would Hurt Me Physically

WHAT THIS SHARING CIRCLE TEACHES:

- We can resist things that are harmful to us, if we know what they are.
- Sometimes the best choice is also the hardest to make.

DIRECTIONS: Gather the students into a circle and tell them: *Before we begin this sharing circle, let's review the ground rules. Who can tell us what some of them are?* Discuss the ground rules in a positive way, adding any that the students forget to mention.

Introduce the topic: *Our topic for this session is, "A Time I Resisted Something I Knew Would Hurt Me Physically."*

Elaborate: *Think of a time when you had an opportunity to do something that you knew wasn't good for you—and you chose not to do it. Maybe your friends were staying out late on a school night, and instead of joining them, you went home to bed. Maybe you hurt yourself playing a sport and stopped playing so that you wouldn't make the injury worse—even though you were needed in the game. Perhaps someone offered you a drug or a cigarette and you said no. Or maybe it was as simple as not eating a candy bar before dinner. Be sure to tell us how you felt when you made this choice. We'll take a few moments to think it over. The topic is, "A Time I Resisted Something I Knew Would Hurt Me Physically."*

Invite the students to take turns sharing. Listen carefully to each person and encourage the other students to do the same. Don't allow negative interruptions. Remember to take a turn yourself.

Optional: When everyone who wants a turn has had one, ask the students to briefly restate what they heard another person say. Explain that this type of review helps improve listening skills.

Summary: After each student who wants to speak has done so, ask:

—What kinds of thoughts did you have when you were making the decision you described?

—Why is it sometimes hard to say no?

—How can learning to say no help us manage stress?

Sharing Circle

A Time I Didn't Take Care of Myself and Paid the Price

WHAT THIS SHARING CIRCLE TEACHES:

- If we don't take care of ourselves, we may have unpleasant consequences to pay.
- We are responsible for taking care of ourselves.

DIRECTIONS: Gather the students together and form a circle. Say to them: *Let's review the ground rules before we begin this sharing circle. Can anyone tell us one of the rules?*

Introduce the topic: *Today, the topic for our circle session is, "A Time I Didn't Take Care of Myself and Paid the Price."*

Elaborate: *Can you think of a time that you really suffered because you didn't take care of yourself? Maybe you didn't brush your teeth after meals when you were younger, and then got a cavity that had to be drilled and filled by the dentist. Perhaps you cut yourself once and didn't clean the cut, so it got infected. Did you ever eat too many sweets at a party and then get sick? Or did you stay up too late playing with video games and then feel too sleepy to do well on a test the next day? How did you feel about what happened? Think about it quietly for a moment. The topic is, "A Time I Didn't Take Care of Myself and Paid the Price."*

Invite everyone to share. Listen carefully to the person who is talking and encourage the others to do the same. Show the students your appreciation for their contributions by thanking them after they share. Remember to take a turn yourself.

Optional: After everyone has had a turn speaking, ask the students if anyone would like to repeat what another person said during the sharing circle. This gives the students an opportunity to demonstrate good listening skills.

Summary: When every student in the circle has had a chance to speak, ask the students:

—*Did we have similar feelings when we suffered the consequences of not taking care of ourselves? What were they?*
—*Why do you think we don't take care of ourselves sometimes?*
—*If you could relive the situation you shared, what would you do differently?*

Something That Makes Me Especially Happy

WHAT THIS SHARING CIRCLE TEACHES:

- We can make ourselves happy anytime we want with our thoughts.
- In most ways people are similar, but not in all ways—and that's okay.

DIRECTIONS: Gather the students into a circle and tell them: *This is our second sharing circle. Let's see how well we remember the ground rules.* Review and discuss the rules in a friendly manner.

Introduce the topic: *Our topic for this session is, "Something That Makes Me Especially Happy."*

Elaborate: *Think about the things you particularly like and tell us about one that almost always makes you happy. It could be something you enjoy doing, eating, or seeing, and it could involve another person—a friend, perhaps. It doesn't have to be anything colossal, just something that causes you to feel happy—even if other people don't feel the same way. Let's take a few moments to think about it quietly. The topic is, "Something That Makes Me Especially Happy."*

Invite the students to take turns speaking. Listen carefully to each one and guide the other students to do the same. Don't allow negative interruptions. Be sure to take a turn yourself.

Optional: After everyone who wants a turn has had one, you may ask the students to briefly tell each other what they heard each other say. Explain that reviews of this kind sharpen their listening skills.

Summary: After each person who wants to speak has done so, ask the students:

—*Who decides whether or not something makes you happy? Why do you think that is?*

—*How can you use your ability to recall happy moments to relieve stress?*

Sharing Circle

Something I Like About Myself

WHAT THIS SHARING CIRCLE TEACHES:

- If we think about it, we all can find at least one thing about ourselves that we like.
- Liking things about ourselves helps us develop self-esteem.

DIRECTIONS: Gather the students into a circle: Review the ground rules for the sharing circle. *Does anyone remember one of the rules? Tell us what it is.* See if the students can come up with all of the rules.

Introduce the topic: *Our topic for this sharing circle is, "Something I Like About Myself."*

Elaborate: *Often we see things in ourselves that we don't like. So let's turn that around and think positively about ourselves. What is there about being you that you especially like? Your hair color? Your height? Your voice? Maybe you like the way you laugh or how gentle you are with animals. Can you read, shoot baskets, or draw well? Think about it silently for a minute before sharing. The topic is, "Something I Like About Myself."*

Invite each student to take a turn speaking while everyone else listens carefully, without interrupting. Be sure to take a turn yourself.

Optional: After everyone has had a chance to share, invite volunteers to repeat what they remember hearing another person say. This makes each person feel heard—and helps all of the students become better listeners.

Summary: After the sharing, ask the students:

—Were we able to think of things that we like about ourselves? How were those things alike or different?

—How does having high self-esteem protect us during times of stress?

Sharing Circle

A Time I Went Along With the Group

WHAT THIS SHARING CIRCLE TEACHES:

- We all succumb to peer pressure at times.
- Frequently, we go along with the group so that we won't appear weird or different.
- The desire to feel accepted by a group may also cause us to go along with its decisions.

DIRECTIONS: Ask the students to sit in a circle, and say to them. *Before we begin the sharing circle, let's take a few moments to say the ground rules quietly to ourselves. When you are finished, and ready to follow the ground rules, we'll begin.*

Introduce the topic: *Our topic for this session is, "A Time I Went Along With the Group."*

Elaborate: *Have you ever been with a group and, even though you didn't feel like doing what the others in the group decided to do, went along with their decision anyway? Maybe you went to a movie you didn't really want to see, or stayed out later than you should, because you didn't want to be the only one to leave the group. Or perhaps the people you were with were saying things you didn't agree with, but you were afraid to show them that you disagreed. We all feel pressured sometimes to think, or talk, or behave like the other people we are with—even though deep inside, we don't feel quite right about it. Think about it for a few moments. The topic is, "A Time I Went Along With the Group."*

Invite the students to take turns sharing. Listen carefully to the person who is speaking, and encourage the other students to do the same. Don't allow negative interruptions, and be sure to take a turn yourself.

Optional: After the students have finished sharing, ask if anyone can remember what another person said. Let the students tell each other what they heard in the circle, and acknowledge them for good listening.

Summary: After each person who wants to speak has done so, ask the students:
—What are we talking about when we use the words "peer pressure?"
—Why do we go along with group decisions that we don't like?
—When is it okay to go along with the group?

Sharing Circle

A Time I Resisted Peer Pressure

WHAT THIS SHARING CIRCLE TEACHES:

- There are many situations in which peer pressure plays a role.
- We can resist peer pressure openly, or privately.
- People who feel good about themselves are better able to resist peer pressure.

DIRECTIONS: Ask the students to form a circle, and say to them: *Before we begin this sharing circle, let's review the ground rules. Can anyone remember all of them?* Discuss any ground rules that haven't been followed in previous sessions.

Introduce the topic: *The topic for this session is, "A Time I Resisted Peer Pressure."*

Elaborate: *Think of a situation in which you felt pressured by a friend or a group of kids to think, talk, dress, or behave in a certain way, and you resisted. Maybe you decided to wear pants to a party, when the other kids had all decided to wear shorts—or were friendly with someone the other kids said was weird. Or perhaps some of your friends planned to cut school on a particular day, and you quietly decided to go to school. It doesn't matter if you resisted the pressure openly, so all the other kids could see, or privately, so they never even knew about it. Maybe you simply resisted having a belief that they had, like the belief that smoking looks cool. The important thing is—you made up your own mind. Think about it for a few moments. The topic is, "A Time I Resisted Peer Pressure."*

Invite the students to take turns sharing. Model attentive listening, and don't allow interruptions. Be sure to take a turn yourself.

Optional: After everyone has had a chance to share, ask if anyone can remember and restate what another person said. Let the students tell each other what they heard in the circle, and acknowledge them for good listening.

Summary: After everyone who wants to speak has done so, ask the students:

—How did you feel when you resisted peer pressure?

—What do you think about a person who always goes along with the group?

—What does self-esteem have to do with resisting peer pressure?

—What are some connections between peer pressure and stress?

Additional Sharing Circle Topics

Distress

"A Time I Was Stressed Out"
"How I Feel About Being Graded"
"A Time I Was Teased"
"I Had a Problem, But I Solved It"
"When I Felt Different From Everyone Else"
"A Time I Felt Slighted"
"A Time I Couldn't Get What I Needed"
"A Time I Felt Completely Overwhelmed"

Eustress

"Something That Makes Me Feel Good"
"The Most Exciting Place I Know"
"One of the Best Times I've Had With a Friend"
"I Did Something That Made Me Feel Like a Good Person"
"My Favorite Way to Get Praise"
"An Achievement That Made Me Proud"
"I Was So Excited I Couldn't Sleep"

Anger and Worry

"A Time I Felt Worried"
"A Time I Felt Angry"
"A Danger I Worry About"
"Something I Do When I Get Angry"
"A Time I Used Self-Control"
"A Time I Was Scared"
"I Was Afraid, But I Did It Anyway"
"A Time I Got Into a Fight"

Assertiveness

"A Time I Was Assertive"
"A Time I Was Passive"
"A Time I Was Aggressive"
"A Time Someone Bullied Me"
"A Time I Used an 'I' Message"
"What I Think Power Is"
"How I Know When to Stop Talking"

Relaxation

"My Favorite Way to Relax"
"Music That Makes Me Feel Good"
"A Quiet Activity That I Enjoy"
"Why I Sometimes Like To Be Alone"
"A Time I Meditated to Relieve Stress"
"My Favorite Daydream"
"First I Visualized Success and Then I Achieved It"

Nutrition

"Something Nutritious I Love to Eat"
"A Healthy Eating Habit I'd Like to Develop"
"My Favorite Snack"
"My Favorite Fruit or Vegetable"
"An Unhealthy Eating Habit I'd Like to Break"
"Something I Enjoy Cooking"

Exercise

"An Exercise I Enjoy"
"Something About My Body That I Like"
"Something About My Body That I'd Like to Improve"
"A Game or Activity I'm Good At"
"A Game or Activity I'd Like to Learn"
"A Time I Used Exercise to Relieve Stress"
"The Strongest Part of My Body Is..."
"The Part of My Body I'd Most Like to Strengthen Is..."

Self-Talk

"Something I Did That I'm Proud Of"
"Something I'm Sure That I Could Do"
"Something I Did That Was Really Creative"
"Something Good Someone Said About Me"
"A Time I Was Needed"
"A Time I Helped a Friend"
"A Time I Handled a Situation Well"
"A Time I Listened Well to Someone"
"A Time Someone Was Especially Nice to Me"

Time Management

"A Time I Achieved a Goal"
"Things I Can Do to Get Where I Want to Be"
"A Time I Was Really Organized"
"Something I Could Do to Get Organized"
"Where I'd Like To Be in Five Years"
"My Favorite Time Waster"
"My Favorite Excuse"
"I Made a Plan and Followed Through"

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About the Author

Sandy Schuster has over 15 years of experience as a teacher, seminar leader, lecturer and trainer. Her experience has included training educators from elementary through college level, parent groups, students and business professionals. She has trained in the areas of stress management, wellness, effective parenting, affective education, and substance abuse prevention and has authored and co-authored numerous books in these areas.

Currently, Sandy is the project and training coordinator for a California State funded project providing training in substance abuse prevention to educators, youth leaders and parents. Her personal philosophy is that wellness and self-esteem are integral to the successful management of stress. Recognizing that wellness patterns are best established early, this book is intended to contribute to the practice of wellness in students of all ages through the teaching of requisite concepts and strategies in counseling, classroom and home settings.

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

A Sourcebook for Teaching Stress Management and Fostering Self-Esteem

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REPRODUCIBLE ACTIVITY SHEETS!

• Discover how beliefs and behaviors contribute to stress!
• Practice a variety of stress management techniques!
• Create a temporary haven from stress in your classroom!

Stress plagues students daily, causing them to feel helpless, overwhelmed, even ill. Stress can erode health, undermine self-esteem and cripple academic progress. Students (and you!) can minimize the effects of stress by managing school and leisure activities more effectively and by using a variety of stress-management techniques. This book:

- Explains in simple terms the nature of stress—what causes it and how it affects you physiologically, mentally, and emotionally.
- Makes clear the role of thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs in controlling and/or exacerbating stress.
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- **Anger and worry**—controllable *internal* sources of stress
- **Progressive relaxation**—letting go of physical and mental tension
- **Breathing exercises**—first aid for angry, frightened kids
- **Visualization**—mastering the technique you already use daily
- **Meditation**—the art of focusing
- **Nutrition and exercise**—the core of stress management
- **Assertiveness**—getting the treatment you want and deserve
- **Self-talk**—learning the language of winners
- **Time management**—organizing to get things done
- **Communication**—making the time to listen

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